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# Egyptian Pieces of the Empire's Puzzle: Peasants, Women, and Students in British Official Documents Issued after the 1919 Revolution in Egypt

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**Egyptian Pieces of the Empire's Puzzle:**  
Peasants, Women, and Students in British Official  
Documents Issued after the 1919 Revolution in Egypt

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**History Senior Thesis**  
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**Spring, 2018**

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## **Acknowledgements**

To those that know me well, it is no surprise that I have a deep love and passion for the Middle East. Therefore, when it came time to pick a topic for my thesis, I naturally chose to write about the Middle East. Over the past four years and countless classes on Middle Eastern history and politics, I have always been drawn to Egyptian history. Learning about the countries complex and rich history have been some of my favorite parts of my Trinity education. I am immensely grateful that I had the opportunity to write a senior thesis on a topic I am so deeply passionate about.

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*For my parents, who gave me the opportunity to experience Egypt firsthand.*

## **Introduction**

British official documents in the immediate post-WWI period repeatedly invoke divisions in Egyptian society as a strategy to justify their occupation of the country since 1882 and to ensure ongoing access to its resources in an era of increasing international attention to self-determination. The proclamation of a British protectorate at the onset of World War I in 1914 led to a period of unrest in Egypt, culminating in the 1919 revolution. The British government responded to the revolution by sending a Special Mission to Egypt in 1921 to investigate the cause of the uprising. The Report of the Special Mission and related British official documents dating from the aftermath of the 1919 revolution present Egyptian society as essentially divided, recalcitrant, and backward. It was important for the British to position themselves as the superior power to protect both their international reputation and their strategic interests in Egypt. Thus, they presented divisions amongst the fellahin (peasants), women, and students in Egypt as “natural” and any common cause between them in the service of national liberation as an ephemeral product of “agitators” and “extremists.” It was beneficial for the British to divide these three sectors of society to appear as though Egypt was not – could not be - united against them. This was part of a complex colonial plan to make Egypt appear orderly and under control within the framework of post-WWI British Empire.

The central project of this thesis is to address the manner in which and extent to which social divisions appear in sources preserved in the British National Archives. While divide and rule tactics are well-known to historians of British empire, the frequency with which the fellahin, women, and students are invoked in these documents suggests that they were the most important and useful social categories to the British occupation of Egypt. In

other words, these three categories emerge from the sources themselves and distinguish the Egyptian case. Thus, I ask how and why the British emphasized the fellahin, women, and students in official documents following the 1919 revolution. Scholarship has largely recognized the challenges the British faced in protecting their interests in Egypt after World War I, yet the way in which the British insisted upon the incompatibility between the fellahin, women, and students in the 1919 revolution has been underestimated as a strategy for ensuring their continued presence in the country. The pattern, weight, and repetition of these categories in the sources indicates that the production of these divisions was part of a discourse of justification and a plan for ongoing British control that transcends any individual. The images that appear in British official documents and the Report of the Special Mission to Egypt were repeated to such an extent that they took on a life of their own.

The first chapter assesses the British perception of the fellahin population, who were portrayed as isolated from Egyptian nationalist unrest in the cities and blissfully content with the British occupation until the 1919 revolution. The mobilization of the fellahin in the revolution received considerable attention because the British had characterized the fellahin as supporters of the occupation.<sup>1</sup> In *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, Joel Beinin states that “during the war peasants evaded the demands of the British rulers to the extent they could – a common ‘weapon of the weak.’”<sup>2</sup> Since this kind of resistance was often invisible, it was easy for British officials to interpret them as –

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Allenby, *Allenby in Palestine: The Middle East Correspondence of Field Marshal Viscount Allenby, June 1917-October 1919*, ed. Matthew Hughes (Stoud: Published by Sutton for the Army Records Society, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Joel Beinin, *The Contemporary Middle East: Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 87.

or to make them appear – content with conditions in the country. Any visible discontent was quickly written off by the British as a result of abuse of power by the Egyptian officials (known by the title of “Omdeh”) the British employed to administer the provinces. In other words, for the British it was not wartime policies, but the manner in which they were carried out by corrupt Egyptian bureaucrats that led the fellahin to lose confidence in the British and join the 1919 revolution. This claim was convenient and beneficial to preserving their position in Egypt. The British used the Omdeh as a scapegoat and depicted this to be the target of fellahin resistance, not the occupation itself.

Historiography of the British occupation points to a much longer history of opposition among the fellahin than British official documents from the period portray. Scholars’ emphasis on the fellahin’s participation in the revolution indicates that Egypt was in fact much more unified than the British were prepared to recognize. It becomes evident that it was part of their divide and conquer strategy to present the fellahin to be exploited and brainwashed by other sectors of Egyptian society and the revolution as their very first act of defiance. In the *Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt, 1882-1914*, Robert Tignor states that “the British used [fellahin] isolation and their separation from the Egyptian population to enhance their image of moral and physical superiority over the Egyptians.”<sup>3</sup> In *The History of Egypt*, P.J. Vatikiotis explains, “it was perhaps natural for the rural population to explode in the manner they did.”<sup>4</sup> While the British professed surprise at the peasants’ role in the revolution and portrayed the apparent unity of the Egyptian population as unnatural and ephemeral, other observers saw it as a major blow to

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Tignor, *Modernization and British colonial rule in Egypt, 1882-1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), 395.

<sup>4</sup> P. J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Egypt*. 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

imperialism in the post-WWI era. In "Peasants in Revolt-Egypt 1919," Ellis Goldberg argues that "contemporaries viewed [the revolution] as having international importance because it was the result of thirty years of European domination, and its resolution would be likely to affect all Western colonial empires."<sup>5</sup> British officials who wanted to stabilize and preserve their imperial privileges in this atmosphere had to work very hard to justify themselves to the rest of the world.

The second chapter dissects the complexity of the position of Egyptian women amidst evolving imperialist and nationalist propaganda. Concurrent with the nationalist movement in Egypt, an international feminist movement was in full swing and greatly concerned with the status of "Eastern" women. Along with the fellahin, Egyptian women's participation in the revolution revealed their discontent towards the British occupation. Their participation also made it explicitly obvious that Egypt was much more unified than the British professed. British official documents from this period were extremely defensive about the position of Egyptian women and painted them to be ignorant, unintelligent, and helpless to justify colonial rule. British officials constantly discussed reforms targeting women. In these documents, it was beneficial to highlight "new opportunities" for Egyptian women's education since 1882, which implied that they had not existed before the British intervened. Yet according to Vatikiotis, "at the turn of the century 95 percent of Egyptians were illiterate, and until 1920 hardly more than 1 percent of the annual budget of Egyptian governments was ever devoted to education. Education during the British occupation had been neglected."<sup>6</sup> The British intentionally neglected education because they feared it

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<sup>5</sup> Ellis Goldberg, "Peasants in Revolt — Egypt 1919," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 261, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/164298>.

<sup>6</sup> Vatikiotis, 435.



would spread nationalism. In regard to women, they “reformed” their curriculum to teach domestic tasks, such as sewing and daily hygiene. Domestic reforms actually narrowed opportunities for women, while the British boasted that they were modernizing the country.

Historians emphasize the importance of the Egyptian women’s participation in the 1919 revolution because, yet again, it reveals a much longer history of Egyptian feminist activity. Beinlin states in “Egypt: Society and Economy, 1923-1952” that “the participation of women in the street demonstrations during the 1919 nationalist uprising irrevocably endowed the women’s awakening with nationalist legitimacy.”<sup>7</sup> In *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt*, Beth Baron argues:

For the first time in Egyptian history, according to many accounts, women were thrust from the private realm onto the public stage. The revolution is thus often taken as the first expression of nationalist sentiment on the part of women, as well as the crucible of the women’s movement. Yet women’s participation in the events of 1919 were a continuation and extension of the activities of the previous decades.<sup>8</sup>

Just as the British professed surprise that the fellahin revolted, the British had not expected the women to participate in the revolution because they intentionally implemented reforms to keep women isolated and uneducated. Conversely, British documents suggest that the British took credit for feminist activity and female education reforms. Yet historiography reveals that Egyptians were the ones to push for female education advancements during the occupation. For example, Leila Ahmed discloses that “in 1912 the nationalists opened community centers which offered lectures and cultural events which

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<sup>7</sup> Joel Beinlin, “Egypt: Society and Economy, 1923-1952,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. by M.W. Daly (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 314.

<sup>8</sup> Beth Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press*, (London, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 35.

women as well as men were encouraged to attend- and which women did attend.”<sup>9</sup> It was beneficial for the British to ignore this type of activity in British official documents in order to take credit for any instance of feminist activity. British officials stressed the contributions of their presence by playing into this rhetoric, reiterating the constraints of the Islamic religion on women, and crediting themselves for Egyptian feminism. Similar to how the British blamed fellahin discontent after the 1919 revolution on the Omdeh the British argue that Egyptian women’s discontent after the 1919 revolution had to do with the inadequacies of Egyptian society. The British used the apparent low-status of Egyptian women to justify the need for colonial rule. Yet again, Britain strategically assigned blame onto Egyptians to defend the need for an ongoing colonial presence.

The third chapter highlights the role Egyptian students played as the “lead agitators”<sup>10</sup> in the 1919 revolution. While British official documents emphasize the unexpectedness of the fellahin’s and women’s participation in the revolution, they predicted unrest amongst Egyptian students. British official documents identify students as the leaders of the disturbances leading up to the revolution and divide them into two categories: students attending Al-Azhar, the premier religious institution of higher education in Egypt, and students in government run schools. Students and teachers of Al-Azhar are depicted as the primary “agitators” and were blamed for feeding nationalist

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<sup>9</sup> Leila Ahmed, “Feminism and Feminist movements in the Middle East, a Preliminary Exploration: Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen,” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vol.5 (1982), 155-156.

<sup>10</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4, Letter, Ayerst Henham Hooker to Lord Allenby, Foreign Office Papers on Mr. Ayerst Henham Hooker’s views and reports on the Egyptian Situation 1919-1923.

propaganda to students in government schools through religious education. Similar to how the British attributed the fellahin's unrest to the lack of British presence in the provinces, British official documents claim that student disturbances were a result of the lack of British teachers in government run schools. In their view, Egyptian students were led astray by the fanatical inclinations of their instructors and by the backwardness of their own parents. Once again, it was not the occupation itself, but the inadequacies of the Egyptian population that were painted as the root causes of the revolution. This was a strategy for asserting the blamelessness of and ongoing need for British presence in the country.

The historiography reveals the complexity of unrest amongst students. They were not brainwashed by religious teachers, nor was their activism the result of an unsupervised upbringing. It was instead a product of domestic and international factors, which the British authorities deliberately downplayed. In *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*, Jamal Mohammad Ahmed states that "the educated classes in Cairo and the provincial cities looked upon President Wilson's declaration as the fulfilment of their dream."<sup>11</sup> President Wilson's "14 Points" speech advocated for self-determination and gave Egyptians the hope that freedom from colonial rule was a feasible goal. In *Egypt from Independence to Revolution 1919-1952*, Selma Botman argues:

what originated as a peaceful political proposal initiated by largely upper-class Egyptian notables, who were influenced by the speeches of President Woodrow Wilson of the United States defending national self-determination, turned into revolutionary activity carried out by the mass population.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jamal Muhammad Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*. Middle Eastern Monographs (London, New York: Oxford University press, 1960), 117.

<sup>12</sup> Selma Botman, *Egypt from Independence to Revolution, 1919-1952, Contemporary Issues in the Middle East* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 29.

In the post-World War I context, President Wilson's speech made it even more difficult for the British to make a case for ongoing colonialism. The British were aware of the influence of President Wilson's speech on Egyptians, so British officials deliberately deflected attention away from the righteousness and capability of Egyptian nationalists to paint Egyptians as incapable of self-rule

Analysis of British foreign office documents affirms the complexity of Britain's position as an imperial power in Egypt at a time of increased international attention to questions of liberation and self-determination. The British strategically and consciously isolated the fellahin, students, and women from one another as part of their divide and rule tactic. Divisions were constantly produced, even within those three sectors of society, as a way to explain the nation's unrest. Every statement, letter, or document produced in British official documents reveals how thoroughly invested in this social construct the British were. Yet, the 1919 revolution forced British officials to contend with an overwhelming display of Egyptian unity. Thus, British official documents and the Report of the Special Mission to Egypt published after the 1919 revolution reveal how their divide and rule tactic failed in Egypt. Nonetheless, they maintained that such unity was superficial, and the real enemies of the Egyptian people were their own corruption, religious fanaticism, and ignorance. The only answer was continuing, if not increasing, British presence. In reality, the Egyptians were neither inherently disobedient, nor inferior to the British, despite these portrayals. It was simply beneficial to the British to perpetuate these stereotypes. British portrayals of Egyptian society sought to position the British Empire in new colonial, domestic, and international contexts in a way that would ensure its survival. In the

Egyptian context, it was part of Britain's plan to maintain their position as Egypt's protectorate.

The conclusions reached in each chapter rely on British official documents produced during or after the 1919 revolution and the Report of the Special Mission to Egypt. I traveled to the British National Archives in August 2017 and January 2018 to conduct my research. Upon my first trip, the sources I found were letters from British expatriates in Egypt written to Lord Allenby, the High Commissioner of Egypt. These series of letter addressed the cause of the unrest that led up to the 1919 revolution. Research during the second visit focused on specific reports produced by the foreign office about the fellahin, women, and students. These reports were commissioned by subcommittees of the Special Mission and published between 1920 and 1921. The purpose of the reports was to investigate the unrest and opposition to the protectorate, with the goal of bringing clarity to the overall situation. It becomes very clear that these reports were not actually concerned with Egyptian grievances but were a way of deflecting responsibility. Lastly, the Report of the Special Mission to Egypt was integral to my argument because it analyzed the situation in Egypt prior to WWI, during WWI, and after WWI, and offered a proposal from the Mission on how to best proceed in Egypt. The report was important because it recognized that Britain's divide and rule tactic had failed, but maintained the assumptions that had driven and justified that tactic prior to 1919.

In order to analyze what was being said about a specific social group, I examined how tropes relating to fellahin, students, and women were present across a series of documents. Focusing on each social group allowed me to recognize the patterns and repetition that were produced by the British. The extent to which these images reoccur

indicates that these divisions were produced by the British and that these three social categories were depicted to be the most important to the British. Furthermore, I looked at the sources in chronological order because of the distinct shift in Britain's perception of social categories after the 1919 revolution. British officials were under scrutiny from Parliament, so they became defensive of their position and sought to deflect the blame. While my primary research was limited to the British perspective of the situation, I also surveyed secondary literature on the colonial period in Egypt, which draws from both British and Egyptian sources. My contribution to this literature lies in a close reading of a substantial cluster of primary sources from a short but high-profile period in the history of British Empire, Egyptian nationalism, and anti-colonial internationalism.

## Chapter 1: Fellahin

Britain occupied Egypt in 1882 as a leading colonial power with financial and strategic plans in mind.<sup>13</sup> Egypt was an extremely important colonial venture for the British because the events that precipitated their occupation would influence what would happen in other parts of their empire.<sup>14</sup> During their occupation, significant cultural and political change occurred in Egypt, which provided insight into changing British strategies of colonial domination and rule. Analysis of British reports on fellahin (Egyptian peasants) grievances during World War I indicate that the British sought to isolate the fellahin from Egyptian society because of the complexity of the post-war period. The British empire not only had to protect their colonial position in Egypt, but also had to carefully portray their image in a complex international, colonial, and domestic context. Given the unrest amongst Egyptian students in the cities, it was imperative to keep the fellahin isolated in the provinces. Reforms were implemented that would keep the fellahin illiterate and confined to agricultural careers.<sup>15</sup> The British hoped this would keep the fellahin on their side. British official documents from 1919 suggest that the British perceived World War I as a turning point for the fellahin – the point at which they turned against the British. This misperception was caused by a combination of ignorance and calculated strategy, as British officials consistently underestimated the fellahin and pursued divide and rule tactics intended to isolate rural areas from the cities. Although wartime grievances

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<sup>13</sup> Ronal Robinson, Ronal Edward, and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians* (St. Martins Press, 1962), 261.

<sup>14</sup> Tignor, *Modernization*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> NA/FO 848/6, Evidence of Mr. R.A. Brown (Controller, Administrative Service, Ministry of Education), 7/1/1920, Foreign Office Papers of evidence taken by Mission in Egypt 1919-1920, Mr. R.A. Brown states, “by the old system of education, a class was being created entirely unfitted for agriculture, the mainspring of Egypt’s prosperity.”

were the precipitating cause for the 1919 revolution, they represented the culmination of a much longer history of resistance to the British occupation across all sectors of Egyptian society.

In the late nineteenth century, Egypt's importance to Britain increased following the completion of the Suez Canal in November 1869; the canal's location shortened the trip from Britain to India drastically.<sup>16</sup> Maintaining control of the Suez Canal was geopolitically and economically strategic, thereby serving the empire's own interests. Upon arrival in Egypt, British officials quickly realized that reforming the Egyptian political and economic structure would not be an easy task. Egypt was nearly bankrupt and in debt around £100,000,000 because of Khedive<sup>17</sup> Ismail's (1863-1879) excessive spending.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, in the first ten years of the occupation, British officials successfully stabilized Egypt's finances, reorganized the administrative system, and reformed the judicial system. British administrators in Egypt received considerable attention for their success in this period, much of which has been attributed to Counsel General of Egypt, Lord Cromer.<sup>19</sup>

The British were well versed colonists by the time they occupied Egypt in 1882. With each colonial endeavor the British experimented with ruling techniques to see what would be the most effective in a given colony. Thus, when faced with adversity in Egypt, it made sense that the British drew on previous techniques that had been successful in other

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<sup>16</sup> Tignor, *Modernization*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> The Term Khedive refers to the Viceroy of Egypt under Turkish Rule.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Tignor, "The Indianization of the Egyptian Administration under British Rule," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 68, No. 3. (April 1963): 636-637.

<sup>19</sup> Daly states, "As an estate manager there is little argument about Cromer's success. During his tenure the proportion of Egypt's budget devoted to servicing the debt was reduced by half; annual government revenue almost doubled, while taxes were progressively reduced; the value of imports rose fourfold. Huge sums were expended on irrigation and agriculture, and agricultural productivity (admittedly difficult to measure) increased." 242.



colonies. In the case of Egypt, historians have drawn a parallel between ruling techniques and implemented reforms in Egypt and India. Tignor explains that “within certain limits, therefore, Egyptian modernization during the British occupation was guided by Indian models. It was carried out by English officials, drawn almost exclusively from India.”<sup>20</sup> British officials introduced institutions, policies, and programs largely based on what had been successful in India. Due to the success in the first ten years of the occupation, it may be suggested that the British thought Egypt could be a replica of their apparent success in India. Therefore, British officials relied heavily on their experience in India in Egypt. While this may have worked to restore Egypt’s financials and stabilize the government, the Egyptian unrest during the protectorate and post-World War I period revealed that effective ruling techniques differed from colony to colony.<sup>21</sup>

From the start of the occupation, British officials professed that the occupation of Egypt would be temporary. The Special Mission to Egypt Report states that their goal was to “secure the stability and tranquility of Egypt so that it would not be torn by internal disturbances and thus threaten England’s strategic route to the East.”<sup>22</sup> The Mission concludes that the uncertainty of the occupation created the belief amongst Egyptians that the British would depart once their finances were straightened out. Historians conclude that British authorities’ lack of transparency about their goals contributed to Egyptian resentment.<sup>23</sup> For example, the Mission describes, “at the time it was the declared intention

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<sup>20</sup> Tignor, “The Indianization,” 661.

<sup>21</sup> This claim is detailed extensively in: Report, Curzon of Kedleson’s report on the Egyptian Situation, The National Archives Website: Discovery, Cabinet 24/119/90, Description available at <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7737092> (accessed January 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Tignor, *Modernization*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Daly, 240.

of the British Government to evacuate the country as soon as these objects were accomplished.”<sup>24</sup> Hence, when the British increased their presence in the early twentieth century under Lord Cromer, Egyptians professed frustration and resentment. As a result, a nationalist movement accelerated in this period, advocating for an independent and self-governing nation and for the departure of British troops.

Egyptian nationalist thought had roots dating back to the early nineteenth century, but historians conclude that it did not evolve into a mass movement until the early twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> The growth of the movement has been attributed to the death of Khedive Muhammad Tawfiq in 1892 and the failure of Lord Cromer to reform Egypt’s political sphere. Lord Cromer frequently condemned Khedive Muhammad Tawfiq’s successor, his seventeen-year-old son. Lord Cromer harped on his inexperience and young age to argue that British presence was necessary. His ridiculing statements became a focal point for Egyptian opposition to the occupation. Egyptian nationalist leaders’ opposition was evident in anti-British newspapers.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, nationalist party leaders, such as Mustafa Kamil and Ahmad Lufti al-Sayyid, began to emerge as prominent figures in opposition to the British. Kamil and Lufti’s ideas became incredibly influential in constructing an Egyptian national identity. They fostered a nationalist way of thinking amongst Egyptians that strongly influenced the events of the 1919 revolution.

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<sup>24</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, Report of the Special Mission to Egypt 09 December, 1920, The National Archives Website: Discovery, Description available at <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7736849>, (accessed November 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Tignor, *Modernization*, 148.

<sup>26</sup> Daly, 241.

Furthermore, historians refer to the early twentieth century as a “transitional phase in the development of modern Egyptian political consciousness.”<sup>27</sup> Egyptian political consciousness was affirmed in their resentment towards Lord Cromer. Under Lord Cromer, recommendations were ignored; measures were not taken to strengthen the constitution; and there was no long-term plan for political reform. This caused the British administration to be out of touch with the situation in Egypt and concluded that it was difficult for Egyptians to support the British occupation when they felt disconnected from the administrators governing their nation. Consequently, this led Egyptians to strengthen their belief that they were capable of self-governing.

The Dinshawi incident of 1906 marked a watershed in modern Egyptian history because of the mobilization of the labor class as part of the nationalist movement. In the village of Dinshawi, an Egyptian woman was accidentally shot and killed by a British officer while pigeon hunting. This provoked Egyptian villagers to attack British officers in the provinces, leaving one British officer dead. As a result, British authorities brought seven Egyptian villagers to trial and prosecuted the accused on the grounds of premeditated murder. Ultimately, seven Egyptian villagers were executed.<sup>28</sup> Egyptians viewed this reprisal as savagely unjust and condemned British authorities for how they handled the situation. Egyptians professed that it was not justifiable that seven Egyptians were brutally executed for the death of one British official.<sup>29</sup> Nationalist leaders in the cities saw the Dinshawi incident as an opportunity to capitalize on grievances in the provinces and organize the working class against the British occupation. They utilized their position to

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Baron, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Daly, 243.

strengthen their fight for national independence. Historians emphasize that the Dinshawi incident was one of the most formative moments in the nationalist movement: “what began as a minor fracas, and should have remained a routine police matter, ended as a two-headed icon of Egyptian nationalist mythology and British imperialism.”<sup>30</sup> The incident was a turning point for the nationalist movement because it realized that mass mobilization to achieve independence was not only necessary but possible.

Following the Dinshawi incident, the nationalist movement recognized the capability workers and peasants had to gain British attention. In efforts to organize a labor party, nationalist leaders implemented formal organizations, such as schools and unions. People’s Night Schools were created in the Higher School Club, which forged a network between middle class activists and workers by providing instruction in literacy, mathematics, language arts, social sciences, religion, and hygiene.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, the “Manual Trades Workers’ Union” was established to provide organization to labor party activism.<sup>32</sup> These advancements marked the changing dynamic between urban and rural populations during this period. Beinín states that the pre-war period was “a period of embryonic development preceding and making possible the real birth of the movement in 1919” because “for the first time Egyptian workers emerged as the subjects of the historical process and not only as its objects, as agents acting on their own behalf despite adverse circumstances.”<sup>33</sup> Historians characterize the period preceding the war to be imperative to the success of the 1919 revolution because it saw the integration of peasants and laborers

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Beinín, *The Contemporary Middle East*, 67.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 82.

into the nationalist movement and the emergence of broad-based support for national unity and independence.<sup>34</sup>

In December 1914, at the onset of World War I, Britain proclaimed a protectorate over Egypt.<sup>35</sup> Given the strategic importance of the Suez Canal, this was a way for the British to secure their position in Egypt. With the protectorate, British officials vowed to protect Egypt during the war and ensured that the protectorate was a developmental step towards an independent Egypt. The British did not properly estimate how significantly the war would affect their colonies, which caused the Egyptian nation to suffer immeasurably. It also led to an increase of British troops, the requisitioning of labor and resources, and inflated prices, which disproportionately affected the fellahin in the provinces.<sup>36</sup> Grievances associated with the war caused the fellahin to suffer immensely, but because they thought that the protectorate was a temporary wartime measure, they were hopeful that it would be abolished after the war. Yet the war

impressed upon Britain the paramount strategic importance of Egypt, and any political settlement with the Egyptian nationalists after the war had to be one that did not jeopardize British strategic control of the area.<sup>37</sup>

When the British government failed to abolish the protectorate after the war, the Egyptian population, from cities to the countryside, was collectively outraged. While historians regard the 1919 revolution as a predictable outcome, the British professed surprise.

The years subsequent to World War I placed the British empire in a complex international context with the formation of the League of Nations, introduction of the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Vatikiotis, 251.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 252.

<sup>37</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49.

mandate system, and President Wilson's 'Fourteen Points' speech. The British empire was under significant scrutiny in this period. The League of Nations was comprised of the victors of World War I and sought to generate best practices of international governance. The system fundamentally guaranteed the continuation of colonial rule and implemented general guidelines for how to rule each country.<sup>38</sup> Simultaneously, President Wilson gave his 'Fourteen Points' speech on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1918, that advocated for every nation's right to self-determination, which was overwhelmingly popular amongst colonial nations.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the League of Nations had to carefully balance how the mandate system was introduced and implemented in order to protect European interests in these countries. Under this new pressure, the British had to be incredibly strategic about how they portrayed their position in British colonies.

The British did not anticipate the enthusiasm with which their subjects internalized President Wilson's speech. In a telegram to Lord Allenby, Ayerst Henham Hooker, a British expat in Egypt discloses:

The speeches of President Wilson have made a great impression on the minds of agitators, and have stimulated them to immediate action. They thought that the moment had arrived when they could make a combined movement with some prospect of success.<sup>40</sup>

President Wilson's speech fostered expectations of immediate action, which did not materialize.<sup>41</sup> In Egypt, President Wilson's speech had given the nation hope that their goal of self-governance was tangibly accessible. Furthermore, Egyptian nationalists were

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<sup>38</sup> Susan Pederson, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 77.

<sup>39</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39.

<sup>40</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>41</sup> Manela, 40.

optimistic that President Wilson would hold true to his proclamations for self-determination and would not recognize the British protectorate. Yet, when the United States acknowledged the protectorate in Egypt, the Egyptian nation felt betrayed. In *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Erez Manela argues:

the disillusionment that followed the collapse of this 'Wilsonian moment' fueled a series of popular protest movements across the Middle East and Asia, heralding the emergence of anticolonial nationalism as a major force in world affairs.<sup>42</sup>

Hence, when British officials decided to prohibit nationalist leader Saad Zaghlul from attending the Paris Peace Conference, the nation responded with revolution. The 1919 Egyptian revolution was one of many upheavals that revealed the international dimensions of anti-colonial nationalism.<sup>43</sup>

The British government sent a Special Mission to Egypt in 1921 to investigate the causes of the revolution in 1919. The Mission hoped to clear up misconceptions about the occupation and enhance the empire's image by appearing to be concerned with the status of Egyptians. The report was published in 1921 and put particular emphasis on the situation of the fellahin during the war in order to address what made them impressionable to nationalist agitation. The Mission discloses:

Unrest among the educated classes in Egypt was, as had already been pointed out, manifest long before the crisis of 1919. But that it should have spread to the fellahin and should have led to outbreaks of savage violence among a class, which has derived such immense benefits from the British Occupation needs explaining.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>43</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 13-14.

<sup>44</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 10.

Correspondence in British official documents corroborates the Mission's statement and affirms that the British considered the mass mobilization of fellahin in the revolution something that needed to be explained. These documents conclude that the obvious factors that influenced the fellahin were: the recruiting for the Egyptian Labor and Camel Transport Corps; the requisition of domestic animals; the requisition of cereals; the rise in food prices; and the collection for the Red Cross Fund.<sup>45</sup> The Mission perceives that "these factors had contributed by the end of 1918 to create a condition of discontent and unrest among the fellahin and some loss of confidence in the benefits of British administration."<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the 1919 report, "Political Conditions in Provinces," states, "the fellahin are discontented because after many years of protection from exploitation they have been seriously exploited during the war."<sup>47</sup> It was not, therefore, the declaration of the protectorate or British wartime policies that were resented, but the way they were implemented in Egypt.<sup>48</sup>

In 1914 Great Britain established the Egyptian Labor and Camel Transport Corps in efforts to employ Egyptians in the war effort. The British recruited Egyptian laborers to work for the British Army in the Sinai and Palestine Campaign. Their work supported the logistical needs of the British army, such as railway construction and transporting supplies on camelback. Wartime mobilization efforts were crucial for Great Britain to maintain its position in the war. To recruit, British agents visited provinces and advertised the benefits

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<sup>45</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 11.

<sup>46</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 12.

<sup>47</sup> NA/FO 608 Files 662/1/8, Report, Political Conditions in Provinces: Expressions of Opinion Extracted Mainly from the Reports of Britain Political Offices, Foreign Office Papers on Peace Conference: British Delegation; Correspondence and Papers June 1919.

<sup>48</sup> In the NA/CAB 24/117/49 report, the Mission stated, "the local officials were mainly responsible for the abuses which occurred." 11.



of enlisting in the labor and transport corps for six months.<sup>49</sup> The British claimed to believe that, for the fellahin, joining the Egyptian Labor and Camel Transport Corps was the rational decision, and they perceived the first round of recruitment to have been successful. In a telegram to Lord Allenby, Hooker, explains that “the men recruited had the time of their lives, good pay, good food, clothing and infinitely better conditions than they had ever experienced before.”<sup>50</sup> Hooker strategically highlights the perks of enlisting to affirm that the British were providing the fellahin opportunities that would not exist without the British occupation. He continues, “the wages paid were of great benefit to the poorer classes of the population.”<sup>51</sup> There was no doubt that the British saw the Egyptian Labor and Camel Transport Corps as a golden opportunity for the fellahin, given “their readiness to re-enlist again and again.”<sup>52</sup> According to the British, grievances did not arise until “the voluntary system had ceased to supply a sufficient number of recruits,” causing administrative pressure to become abusive.<sup>53</sup>

Press gang methods were apparently employed by the Omdeh (native officials)<sup>54</sup> to recruit when the fellahin no longer voluntarily enlisted. The 1919 report, “Political Conditions in Provinces,” explains, “enlistments to the E.L.C. and C.T.C. were entirely in the hands of the Omdeh who sold exemptions and enlisted their personal enemies. Men were enlisted often after exemptions had been paid.”<sup>55</sup> In a letter to Lord Allenby, Reverend Macintyre, a member of the Church Missionary, notes that he knows of a case “where a

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<sup>49</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>50</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>51</sup> CAB 24/117/49, 11.

<sup>52</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>53</sup> CAB 24/117/49, 11.

<sup>54</sup> CAB 24/117/49, 11.

<sup>55</sup> NA/FO 608 Files 662/1/8.

young man enlisted voluntarily for six months in Palestine, and the very day after his return to his village was forced by threats to sign on again, and sent back at once.”<sup>56</sup> The British perceived fellahin discontent to be with the conscription methods used by the Omdeh, who were left unsupervised in the provinces. The war pulled experienced British officials out of the provinces, giving the Omdeh the power to “take advantage of the position, sending their enemies to serve, while letting off their friends and accepting bribes for exemptions and substitutions.”<sup>57</sup> The British consistently blamed the Omdeh for employing press gang methods in the provinces,<sup>58</sup> but the mission admits that “British pressure was asserted as the excuse for them.”<sup>59</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising that British documents dissect the role of the Omdeh during the war to prove that these grievances were not their fault. Hooker concludes that “great laxity was shown, in allowing vast amount of unsupervised compulsory power to be placed in the hands of the rich and unscrupulous provincial Omdeh.”<sup>60</sup> It is important to note that this was “unsupervised” power to deflect the blame on the greedy and corrupt Omdeh. The British believed that the abuses were due to a lack of supervision and reported that grievances from the fellahin were caused by the inability of British colonial administrators to regulate Omdeh power.

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<sup>56</sup> NA/FO 141/521/6, Telegram, Reverend Macintyre to Lord Allenby, 4 April 1919 no. 9011, Foreign Office Papers on the Egyptian Political Situation: Personal Views of the Reverend J.L. Macintyre of the Church 1919.

<sup>57</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 11.

<sup>58</sup> NA/FO 848/6, Evidence of Mrs. C.B.S. Elgood (Chief Lady Medical Officer, Girls’ Schools), 7/1/1920, Foreign Office Papers of evidence taken by Mission in Egypt 1919-1920.

The report states that “the power of the Omdeh in an Egyptian village is very great and frequently abused. The petty tyranny and corruption, of which the Omdehs are often guilty, results in much suffering and discontent among the people and is one of the causes of the great prevalence of crime.”

<sup>59</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 11.

<sup>60</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

In regard to the collection for the Red Cross Fund, reports suggested that the lack of British authorities in the provinces allowed the Omdeh to take advantage of the fellahin again. In a letter to Field Marshall Henry Wilson, Lord Allenby expresses that “collections made, throughout the country, for the Red Cross Fund. This is a very real grievance.”<sup>61</sup> The Mission professes that collections “intended to be voluntary, were in practice, frequently made compulsory by officials seeking to acquire merit by the amounts which their districts contributed.”<sup>62</sup> Comparable to how British officials attributed involuntary Labor Corps recruitment to the Omdeh, the Mission argues that the collections for the Red Cross were supposed to be voluntary, yet again, due to lack of supervision the Omdeh took advantage of their position of power. They conclude that this led to the belief that “only a portion of the total amount collected reached its real destination.”<sup>63</sup> The British were scapegoating Egyptians by insinuating that native Omdeh officials stole and forced contributions from the poor fellahin, who were already suffering during the war. The Mission explains:

to entrust the collection to local Egyptian officials was inevitably to open the door to abuses, entailing additional pressure on the poorer classes, with whom many other circumstances made the war unpopular.<sup>64</sup>

It was beneficial to harp on the inadequacy of the Omdeh to secure their position in Egypt. The British asserted the importance of colonial rule by blaming native officials for fellahin grievances by portraying them as greedy and untrustworthy when not under the supervision of the British.

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<sup>61</sup> Allenby, *Allenby in Palestine*.

<sup>62</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 12.

<sup>63</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 12.

<sup>64</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 12.

Reports also claim that British officials in the provinces were not cautious enough when requisitioning materials for the war.<sup>65</sup> The Mission describes that “the fellahin were most unwilling to part with their animals” and “often hardly hit by the removal of [their] means to transport.”<sup>66</sup> British officials did not feel that the requisition of animals was a justified grievance because requisitions were “inevitable in a state of war.”<sup>67</sup> They perceived that the grievance was that the British paid fair prices for animals at the start of the war, but the prices for the Egyptians to buy them back at the end of the war were significantly higher.<sup>68</sup> Conversely, the Mission viewed the fellahin’s discontent concerning the requisition of cereals to be more legitimate because they did not bear the blame. In the requisitioning of cereals, “districts were assessed to furnish a given quantity, and the collection was left to local officials, who derived large profits from the transaction.”<sup>69</sup> In the case of wheat, the Omdeh collected larger quantities of wheat than required and profited by selling them at higher market rates. If individuals were unable to meet the given wheat quantity, they were forced to purchase their quota at market rates and return it for a lower requisition rate. This caused the average consumption of wheat to drop drastically by 1918, which led to shortages in the provinces and the cities. Ultimately, the British concluded that the Omdeh made huge profits, while the fellahin continued to suffer. For example, the report, “The Present Situation and Its Difficulties,” claims:

The recent phenomenal increase of wealth in Egypt is not only precarious itself, but its benefits are mainly confined to one class, the landowners, great and small. On the other hand, the landless portion of the peasantry and the lower orders of the towns

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<sup>65</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>66</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 11.

<sup>67</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 11.

<sup>68</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 11.

<sup>69</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 11.

are suffering terribly from the scarcity of essential food stuffs and the rise of prices.<sup>70</sup>

The Mission argues, “the local officials were mainly responsible for the abuses which occurred, but they were attributed to the British, who, under the exceptional conditions prevailing, were unable to control them.”<sup>71</sup> Not only did the Mission blame the Omdeh for this grievance, but they used the war as an excuse for not controlling the situation in the provinces. It was necessary to assert that the war caused “exceptional conditions” that they “were unable to control” to argue that this was not the normal happenstance in Egypt.

Sir Thomas Russell Pasha<sup>72</sup>, a police officer in the Egyptian service, recounts fellahin grievances in his autobiography, *Egyptian Service*. He describes that the fellah

was forced to give up his donkey and his camel, without which he could not transport his produce. True, a fair price was fixed by the Army, but by the time it reached him much had stuck to other fingers. In any case no money could compensate for the loss of his beasts of burden, which were irreplaceable and his resentment against the British grew till it reached a burning heat when his cereal and other crops were also commandeered.<sup>73</sup>

Based on Russell Pasha’s claim, the British perceived that the grievance was that the fellahin felt robbed by the British Army and deceived by how requisitions were carried out. They concluded that the fellahin held the British accountable for their suffering during the war because they had been assured they would be protected by the British. Russell Pasha argues that “it must have been very hard during the First World War for the fellah of an Egyptian village to understand what was going on in the world outside Egypt.”<sup>74</sup> He

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<sup>70</sup> NA/FO 848/19. Report, The Present Situation and Its Difficulties, Foreign Office papers on General Conclusions Arrived at by the Mission, Mission’s Review of the Administration 1919-1921.

<sup>71</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Went by “Russell Pasha.”

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Russell, *Egyptian Service* (London: Murray, 1949), 191.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 190.

continues that “as the war went on, he found more and more being demanded of him by these same British for reasons that he was incapable of appreciating.”<sup>75</sup> It can be suggested that Russell Pasha’s autobiography was intended for an international audience that understood the scope of World War I. Thus, it was advantageous to portray the fellahin as ignorant about the consequences of war and disconnected. He insinuates that if the fellahin understood the complexity of World War I, they would recognize the necessity of requisitioning materials for wartime measures.

Food shortages caused by wartime measures also hit the fellahin class hard.<sup>76</sup> This occurred because of the excess of food exports for the war, inflated prices, and the requisition of local food and resources.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, the war affected the international economy and the state’s manipulation of resources exacerbated the food shortages.<sup>78</sup> In Egypt, the fellahin suffered the consequence of inflation on everyday necessities, such as “corn, clothing, and fuel.”<sup>79</sup> The Mission explains that “a family of four – a man, his wife and two small children – could not, at the beginning of 1919, obtain a sufficiency of food except at a cost which considerably exceeded the ordinary rate of wages.”<sup>80</sup> British reports state that the fellahin’s wages were insufficient to meet the cost of standard living, and the progressive rise of prices throughout the war gave the fellahin reason to fear they would starve. Additionally, British reports suggest that while the fellahin continued to struggle, “they saw a limited number of their countrymen and the unpopular foreigner making large

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibd*, 190-191.

<sup>76</sup> NA/FO 141/521/6.

<sup>77</sup> Goldberg, 264.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibd*.

<sup>79</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 12.

<sup>80</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 12.

fortunes.”<sup>81</sup> According to Reverend Macintyre, this led the fellahin to believe that “get rid of the English and all our troubles will cease.”<sup>82</sup> By contrast, the British argued that it was not their presence, but wartime conditions, that caused problems for the fellahin and made them vulnerable to nationalist propaganda.<sup>83</sup>

When the war ended in 1918, Britain did not abolish the protectorate because it was imperative to protect Britain’s essential interests in Egypt, first and foremost the maintenance of imperial communications through the Suez Canal.<sup>84</sup> The Mission explains that the Egyptians hoped Britain would dissolve the protectorate because they had viewed it as a temporary wartime measure. This idea was rooted in their understanding “that efforts would be made at the end of the war to satisfy their national aspirations.”<sup>85</sup> Indeed, continued British presence in Egypt was met with severe hostility from nationalist party leaders, such as Saad Zaghlul. Zaghlul had been an active member in the nationalist party since the beginning of the British occupation and was characterized as the lead “agitator” in the nationalist movement.<sup>86</sup> Directly following the war, Zaghlul requested permission to travel to Paris to advocate for total Egyptian independence. The report, “Indian and Egyptian Conspirators in England and the Remedy,” proclaims that Zaghlul

now makes a great point of ‘having waited till the Allies had won the war and signed the Armistice’ before beginning to agitate. Without open incitements to revolt, however, he succeeded, during the four years of war, in making very thorough preparations for a rising, and as soon as the Armistice was signed he demanded the

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<sup>81</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 12.

<sup>82</sup> NA/FO 141/521/6.

<sup>83</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>84</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 37.

<sup>85</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 37.

<sup>86</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

right to go to Paris with a mandate from the people, to claim complete independence for Egypt.<sup>87</sup>

The international climate following the war and heightened focus on the status of imperial nations had fostered hope amongst Egyptians that independence was a feasible goal.<sup>88</sup>

Zaghlul's request was denied because his persistent nature and ability to rally Egyptians against the protectorate was perceived to be the root of the chaos. It can also be suggested that British officials denied his request because he would be a bad reflection of the empire's work in Egypt at the Paris Peace Conference. This decision was met with severe backlash from the Egyptian population and Zaghlul "became more and more truculent in his demands and language and began to organize a widespread rebellion."<sup>89</sup> Consequently, British officials decided to arrest and deport Zaghlul and his associates to the British colony, Malta. The British expressed that they hoped this would put an end to the disorder in Egypt.<sup>90</sup> Instead, this resulted in a mass movement of the Egyptian people.<sup>91</sup>

To the British's surprise, the week following their arrest, demonstrations broke out in the cities, which quickly spread to the provinces. This sparked a revolution amongst the Egyptian nation that "was a national movement backed by the sympathy of all classes and creeds among this Egyptian population."<sup>92</sup> British official documents put emphasis on events in the provinces because they quickly escalated into a brutal revolt within the week. They explain:

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<sup>87</sup> NA/CAB 24/83/56, Report, Indian and Egyptian Conspirators in England and the Remedy, Description available at <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7733706>. (accessed January 2018), 7.

<sup>88</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 12-13.

<sup>89</sup> NA/CAB 24/83/56, 7.

<sup>90</sup> NA/Botman, 28-29.

<sup>91</sup> Vatikiotis, 264.

<sup>92</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 14.



By the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> March trouble had spread to most of the Delta provinces, where attempts to interrupt communication had become general. On the 16<sup>th</sup> the railway and telegraphic communication between Cairo and the delta, as well as with Upper Egypt was broken. By the 18<sup>th</sup> the provinces of Behera, Gharbia, Menufia and Dakkhalia were in a state of open revolt.<sup>93</sup>

Thus, the Mission admits that “the consequences of deporting the Nationalist leaders were not rightly estimated.”<sup>94</sup> Hooker explains to Lord Allenby that “what was not expected was the careful and extensive preparation of the movement, which included Moslems, Copts and Bedouins, not to mention practically the whole Agricultural population.”<sup>95</sup> Their reaction to the 1919 revolution suggests that because Britain ruled through divide and rule tactics, they were not prepared for a unified response and considered it an anomaly. Hooker affirms this and states “it is the first time in modern Egyptian history that the whole of the native population has co-operated in a political movement.”<sup>96</sup> British officials’ reaction indicated that they saw the fellahin sector of society to be isolated from nationalist propaganda in the cities. This was a convenient perception because it helped them make the case for the benefits of the protectorate.<sup>97</sup> Yet, the fellahin’s participation in the revolt suggested that the British underestimated their political consciousness.

British reports produced after the 1919 revolution assess its causes and primarily focus on fellahin grievances during the war, ignoring a much longer history of resistance to the occupation. While the Dinshawi incident in 1906 was smaller scale than the revolution of 1919, both mobilizations crossed sectors of society. Despite this history, in a letter to Field Marshall Wilson, Lord Allenby states, “for the first time since 1882 they are against

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<sup>93</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 14.

<sup>94</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 14.

<sup>95</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>96</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>97</sup> Tignor, *Modernization*, 397.

us. Previously, the fellahin have been our friends.”<sup>98</sup> It was beneficial to portray the fellahin to be supporters of the occupation, victims of corrupt Egyptian officials, and lackeys of urban nationalist leaders. Further, the British used divide and rule tactics in Egypt to avoid a similar situation that happened in India. The report, “Indian and Egyptian Conspirators in England and the Remedy,” describes “the details of the rising are too well known to need repetition. It bears many points of resemblance to the beginning of the Indian Mutiny.”<sup>99</sup> As a result, British officials attempted to isolate the fellahin through divide and rule tactics to avoid a similar situation in Egypt. Yet their participation in the revolution revealed that these tactics had failed because Egyptians were actually significantly more unified in their perception and rejection of colonialism than the British understood or were prepared to admit.

The image of the isolated and ignorant fellahin appears throughout the Special Mission report and British official documents. The Mission asserts that during the 1919 revolution “the disorders were confined to the neighborhood or large centers and to districts along the main lines of communication,”<sup>100</sup> while “in remoter villages, less readily accessible to propagandists and agitators, little disposition was shown by the small farmers to take part in any such movement.”<sup>101</sup> It seems to have been important to insist that a sector of the fellahin population did not participate in the revolt in order to justify the British imperial project in Egypt. They divided the fellahin population based on geographical location to explain why certain sectors participated in the revolt. The

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<sup>98</sup> Allenby, *Allenby in Palestine*.

<sup>99</sup> NA/CAB 24/83/56, The Indian Mutiny referred to is the Indian rebellion against British rule in 1857, 7.

<sup>100</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 10.

<sup>101</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 11.

disturbances that took place near lines of communication occurred because the British perceived they were able to access cities, which were the centers of unrest. This suggested that the British did not believe the fellahin would have acted independently. They consistently blamed “agitators” in the cities for fueling fellahin resentment towards the British. Hooker affirms that “the nationalist leaders made the most of the growing discontent, and at once started propaganda that would appeal to the passions and prejudices of the fellahin.”<sup>102</sup> Their participation in the revolution implies that the fellahin were not as ignorant or isolated as the British perceived. It also suggested that the stark social divisions described in British official documents were not the reality in Egypt.

The British insisted on these divisions because they were useful in legitimizing British wartime strategy and ongoing occupation. Given the unrest in the cities, it was expedient to focus on the fellahin’s dependence on British support and their alleged victimization or brainwashing by other sectors of Egyptian society. Indeed, throughout British official documents, the British portrays the fellahin to be the principal supporters and beneficiaries of the occupation. For example, the foreign office report “The Present Situation and Its Difficulties,” states:

There is no general hostility to the British amongst the fellahin or smaller landowners. Any manifestations of such hostility have been due to the influence of Nationalist emissaries from the towns, exploiting religious feeling or temporary grievance connected with the war.<sup>103</sup>

The British did not take responsibility for the grievances they caused, but instead blamed the Omdeh for abusing power and mistreating the fellahin. This is evident in the Mission’s depiction of wartime grievances They portray wartime measures, such as the Egyptian

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<sup>102</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>103</sup> NA/FO 848/19.

Labor and Camel Transport Corps, as profitable opportunities. Therefore, they attribute the fellahin's grievances to British officials' disappearance from the provinces, which made the fellahin more susceptible to abuse by native authorities.<sup>104</sup> The Mission concludes:

those unfortunate incidents of the war period, to which we have already alluded, shook for a time their confidence in our justice and good-will, and were predisposing causes of the savage outbreak of anti-British feeling in the spring of 1919.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, it was the "unfortunate incidents of the war period" that caused the fellahin to resent the British occupation because they had failed to act as their protectors.<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, the British maintains that "agitation among the fellahin was of a far more partial character than has been generally supposed."<sup>107</sup> Nonetheless, by painting this as a turning point, they were able to admit that the fellahin were far less isolated and ignorant than they presumed.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> NA/FO 608 Files 662/1/8 states that, "finally as concerns the fellahin. The motor car enables the English official to get about so fast that he never speaks to a fellah."

<sup>105</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 16.

<sup>106</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 12.

<sup>107</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 10.

<sup>108</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 16.

## **Chapter 2: Women**

Based on the feminist activism that occurred over the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is hard to believe that the participation of women in the 1919 revolution came as a surprise to the British. Their astonishment indicated that the British believed their attempts to narrow education opportunities would keep women isolated from the nationalist movement. Egyptian women's participation in the movement revealed their discontent with the occupation and further threatened the security of the empire. For that reason, the British had to defend the occupation and portrayed Egyptian women to be unintelligent, ignorant, and powerless by playing on gender stereotypes to justify the need for continued British presence. In British official documents, the British constantly harp on the constraints of the Islamic religion on women to explain their lack of attention to female reforms during the occupation. Similar to the portrayal of the fellahin, British officials downplayed women's participation in the revolution because it was essential to maintain that Egyptians were disunited, backwards, and ill-prepared for self-rule in the international context after the war. Additionally, an international feminist movement was rapidly spreading across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, which made it imperative for the British to justify their treatment of women to audiences at home and abroad. Already in the early years of the occupation, British officials narrowed educational opportunities for women and sought to undermine the feminist movement by dividing women by class, occupation, and residence. At the same time, they claimed to be doing everything they could to improve the status of Egyptian women.

Prior to the occupation, an Egyptian feminist consciousness had existed alongside the nationalist movement in the late nineteenth century. The British constantly took credit

for the emergence of an Egyptian feminist movement in British official documents, yet historiography reveals that its origins dated to before the occupation. Over the course of Muhammad Ali's reign in Egypt (1805-48), efforts were made to modernize Egypt through industrial, education, social, and technology reforms.<sup>109</sup> In particular, these reforms opened new opportunities for upper- and middle-class Egyptian women.<sup>110</sup> For example, the school for midwives opened in 1832 and the first girls' state school was established in 1837. Muhammad Ali also permitted tutors to teach in women's homes, which fostered an educated class of Egyptian women. The results of Muhammad Ali's female education reforms became visible in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when Egyptian women began to teach in schools and publish books, journals, and articles.<sup>111</sup>

The role of the Egyptian women's press played an integral role in the construction of the feminist national identity alongside the Egyptian nationalist movement. Although women's journals had existed, historians mark 1907 as a turning point for women periodicals because of the effect their publications had on the British occupation. Following the Dinshawi incident in 1906, the women's press became exceedingly vocal against the British occupation. For example, Fatima Rashid established the Jam'iyyat Tarqiyat al-Mar'a (The Society for Women's Progress) and began holding meetings in her home to discuss the status of Muslim women in Egypt. Jam'iyyat Tarqiyat al-Mar'a published articles that advocated for female rights and backed the nationalist party's efforts.<sup>112</sup> In reaction to the Dinshawi incident, they published articles that condemned the British authorities for their

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<sup>109</sup> Beinin, *Workers and Peasants*, 139.

<sup>110</sup> Margot Badran, *Feminist, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1995), 17.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>112</sup> Baron, 27-28.

harsh and unjust treatment towards Egyptian villagers and portrayed British officials in the provinces as savage colonists. Through these publications, a relationship formed between feminists and nationalist leaders. Egyptian women's stern opposition to the British occupation in their journals impressed upon the nationalist party the importance of championing women's rights as part of their campaign against the British occupation.

Beinin affirms this claim and states:

elite men and women began to encourage the women's awakening - education of women and their entry into white-collar professions (at least until marriage or after widowhood), and the formation of women's social and political organizations - as expressions of a national revival.<sup>113</sup>

With the support of Egyptian men, Egyptian women took on new roles in society.

In the early twentieth century, Egyptian women began convening discretely in segregated public spaces. Upper- and middle-class Egyptian women became headmasters and teachers in the new Egyptian University in 1908, held female lectures, and established philanthropic societies.<sup>114</sup> Emerging feminist leader, Huda Sha'rawi, held lectures at the Egyptian University that encouraged women to pursue higher education degrees and new careers, and pushed women to challenge societal traditions, such as the veil. In 1909 Huda Sha'rawi founded the first female philanthropic society, Mabarrat Muhammad Ali. Mabarrat Muhammad Ali functioned as a medical center for lower-class Egyptian women and introduced women's health care to poor Egyptian communities. Historians emphasize that organizations such as, Mabarrat Muhammad Ali, allowed Egyptian women to gain

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<sup>113</sup> Beinin, "Egypt: Society and Economy," 312.

<sup>114</sup> Badran, 21-22.

organizational and management experience that was integral in preparing them for the 1919 revolution.<sup>115</sup>

Feminist activity at the turn of the century was less visible to the British because it had been occurring in private and segregated spaces. Yet in the early twentieth century Egyptian women confidently entered the public sphere to join causes with the nationalist movement. In *The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem*, Matiel Mogannam describes, “Egypt can now boast of many women writers and reformers who have won for themselves a world-wide reputation. Even in the political field these ladies have proved to be an invaluable asset to their country.”<sup>116</sup> For example, in 1909 Egyptian women were asked to join the British Lady Cromer society, but declined the offer on nationalist grounds.<sup>117</sup> Instances like this revealed that Egyptian women demanded their civil rights through the nationalist platform. In 1910, Egyptian feminist, Inshira Shawqi voiced her support for the nationalist movement in a letter read by the congress chairman at the Nationalist Congress in Brussels.<sup>118</sup> Present or not, Egyptian women were publically voicing their support for the nationalist movement. A year later, in 1911 Egyptian women entered the public sphere when Egyptian feminist, Malak Hifini Nasif, attended the all-male nationalist meeting of the Egyptian Congress in Egypt to publically voice feminist demands. This marked a watershed in Egyptian feminist history, as women advocated for their rights in a male forum.

Now that Egyptian women had entered the public sphere and voiced their support for the nationalist movement, the British became concerned with the condition of Egyptian

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>116</sup> Matiel E.T. Mogannam, *The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem* (Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1976), 50.

<sup>117</sup> Badran, 24.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.



women in the early twentieth century. In "Competing, Overlapping, and Contradictory Agendas: Egyptian Education Under British Occupation, 1882-1922," Mona Russell describes that "the British in general, and Cromer, in particular, used the 'lowly' position of women in Egypt as a justification for the occupation."<sup>119</sup> The British constantly connected the status of women to the advancement of Egyptian society to justify the need for colonial rule. Lord Cromer concluded that the only way to enhance Egyptian women's position was through education reforms.<sup>120</sup> It was advantageous for Cromer to boast about the lowly status of Egyptian women and champion the Egyptian feminist movement because it justified the British occupation. He constantly professed that the status of Egyptian women had been neglected until the British intervened and credited the British for any instance of female advancement. While Lord Cromer advocated that female education reforms would elevate the lowly status of women, the British in fact narrowed education opportunities by refining the curriculum to be focused on teaching domesticity for women. British documents reveal that under the British, government run schools taught cooking, laundry, ironing, and sewing, which they professed was a more practical use of female education.<sup>121</sup> Conversely, Mona Russell describes that Egyptian women "viewed the entrance of such subjects in the curriculum with disdain"<sup>122</sup> and concludes that "it is clear that the

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<sup>119</sup> Mona L. Russell "Competing, Overlapping, and Contradictory Agendas: Egyptian Education Under British Occupation, 1882-1922" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 21, no. 1 (2001): 54.

<sup>120</sup> Russell, "Competing, Overlapping, and Contradictory Agendas," 54.

<sup>121</sup> NA/FO 848/7, Report, Notes on the Present Organization of Female Education in Egypt, Foreign Office Papers on Education: series of documents, statistics and memoranda submitted to Mission on subject of education in Egypt 1919-1920. The report states, "in higher elementary schools practical training in domestic subjects (cookery, laundry, needlework, etc.) forms an essential element in the curriculum in all the classes." 7.

<sup>122</sup> Russell, "Competing, Overlapping, and Contradictory Agendas," 56.

overweening push to domesticity was neither popular nor efficient.”<sup>123</sup> It is evident that the British administration narrowed education reforms to keep them isolated from the nationalist movement and evolving international feminist movement. Their apparent support for Egyptian women was a façade to enhance their stance with the British suffragette movement and image as a colonial power.

The end of World War I generated an international discussion about the status of colonial nations and how they were governed. A main concern of these discussions was the status of colonial women. Countless articles, periodicals, and reports that discussed the status of women in British colonies circulated in Europe. Historians suggest that colonial women were such a focal point because of the emerging international feminist movement.<sup>124</sup> In particular, attention was drawn to the prevalence of feminist movements in Middle Eastern countries. This was evident in Iran, Palestine, and India.<sup>125</sup> In regard to the British empire, women’s rights were a debated topic due to the development of the British women’s suffragette movement in the twentieth century. Therefore, when Egyptian women participated in the 1919 revolution, the British empire had to carefully construe a narrative that downplayed women’s participation and was favorable of the occupation.

After the war, colonial support groups emerged in England that criticized British ruling tactics used in British colonies. These groups made claims that accused British officials of abusing colonial women, which were troublesome because this degraded the empire’s reputation. British officials often referred to these groups as “conspirators” and

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<sup>123</sup> Russell, “Competing, Overlapping, and Contradictory Agendas,” 56.

<sup>124</sup> Beinín, “Egypt: Society and Economy,” 312-313.

<sup>125</sup> Ian Christopher Fletcher ed., Laura E. Nym Mayhall ed., and Philipa Levine ed., *Women’s Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizen, Nation, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 2000), 1-2.

expressed fear of them plotting to stir up domestic and colonial disturbances.<sup>126</sup> For example, the Egyptian Association in Great Britain was a support group based in London that was vocally opposed to the occupation. Their mission was to voice Egyptian grievances and bring attention to the unjust continuation of the protectorate following the war. After British officials denied Egypt the right to speak on their own behalf at the Paris Peace Conference, the Egyptian Association in Great Britain submitted a petition on behalf of the Egyptian people, stating that recognition of the British protectorate would be “a complete violation of his well-known principles of justice and fair play to the weak as well as the strong nations.”<sup>127</sup> Given that British censorship laws prohibited Egyptians from freely publishing articles, the Egyptian Association in Great Britain used their domestic platform to speak on behalf of Egyptians.

In May of 1919 the Egyptian Association addressed a letter to the British government in regard to the conduct of the British military in Egyptian provinces. The letter is written by the Egyptian Association’s secretary, H.Y. Awad, and includes a report of the Giza Provincial Council provided by Mr. Tadros J. Makar<sup>128</sup> that accuses British military authorities of committing gross atrocities against Egyptians. Awad exclaims, “we appeal to all Englishmen who love the fair name of their country to remain unstained, who are proud of the British traditions and who believe in justice and fair play to come in our help.”<sup>129</sup> He

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<sup>126</sup> For further descriptions of this see NA/CAB 24/83/56.

<sup>127</sup> Egyptian Association in Great Britain to U.S. Ambassador in Paris, 25 April 1919, USNA, RG 256, 883.00/114.

<sup>128</sup> NA/ FO 608/214/1, Statements and letters by the Egyptian Association of Great Britain outlining Egyptian aspirations and condemning British military rule, Foreign Office Papers on Egypt: Social Unrest. The letter states that “the following are extracts from the report of the Giza Provincial Council supplied to us by Mr. Tadros I. Makar who has just returned from Egypt.”

<sup>129</sup> NA/FO 608/214/1.

suggests that if Englishmen did not accept his appeal, the country's reputation could be tarnished. Awad goes on to cite examples that stressed the mistreatment of women and arbitrary brutality. For instance, he describes, "villages [that] have been bombed and raised to the ground. Women and children being slain while these repressive measures were being carried out and peaceful demonstrators have been fired upon with machine guns."<sup>130</sup> Awad's depictions portrays British soldiers as savagely and unjustly attacking Egyptians.

Similar claims are made in the report itself, dated April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1919. This report includes council members' description of atrocities committed by the British military in the Giza provinces during the revolution. A member recounts his experience:

My wife and three daughters (the eldest of whom is only eight years old) were terrified and got under the bed-steads. The soldiers entered my wife's room and dragged her out by her hair. They did the same to my children. The earrings of my children were forcibly snatched from their ears tearing the flesh. My wife's necklace and bracelets, too, were snatched away inflicting cuts on the neck and hands. Then the troops ransacked my house taking over three hundred pounds from my safe as well as the remainder of my wife's jewelry tearing up all my valuable papers; then they ordered us out of the house which they then set on fire.<sup>131</sup>

He concludes by observing that troops

tore the clothes of the women insulting them by touching their naked bodies; this sight was too much for me and I was overcome. I have not the slightest doubt that unfortunate women had suffered the disgrace of the violation of their honor."<sup>132</sup>

His statements are filled with emotion. From stripping women of their jewelry to tearing off their clothes and touching their bodies, the assault on the women of the provinces clearly crossed a line for the council members. It also appears to have crossed a line for the British government. These accusations posed a serious threat given the current domestic

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<sup>130</sup> NA/FO 608/214/1.

<sup>131</sup> NA/FO 608/214/1.

<sup>132</sup> NA/FO 608/214/1.

and international contexts. With the British suffragette and Egyptian nationalist movement working to spread awareness about the condition of colonial women, this report focusing on the treatment of Egyptian women was source of serious concern. It also had the ability to stir up further nationalist unrest Egypt, direct additional scrutiny to the actions of the British military in other colonies, and tarnish the reputation of the British empire in the League of Nations. As well, the accusations made in this report bear resemblance to claims made following the Dinshawi incident.<sup>133</sup> Once again, this report degrades British troops by portraying their behavior as savage and merciless. In this complex context it was imperative that the British government defend itself against these accusations.

In “Parliamentary Debates: Official Report constituted between May 19th to June 6<sup>th</sup> 1919,” the coalition government and principal officers of the House of Commons discuss concerns about the Egyptian Association in Great Britain’s allegations about British troops. Foremost, committee members ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures would be taken to cease further publications from this group. Sir John Butcher (1<sup>st</sup> Baron Danesfort, Conservative Party politician) asks, “whether he [Secretary of State for the Home Department] will take immediate steps to prevent the further publication of this circular and to bring those responsible for its publication to justice.”<sup>134</sup> Major Earl Winterton (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Conservative Party politician) also asks if

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<sup>133</sup> NA/FO 371/451 Summary of El-Katr-el-Masri: Let it be supposed. Whither lies our road? What is our Future? 28 August, 1908, Foreign Office Papers on political departments: general correspondence from 1906-1966, Egypt. Code 16 File 14935-22713.

<sup>134</sup> Sir John Butcher (1<sup>st</sup> Baron Danesfort, Conservative Party politician), Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 19 May to 6 June, 1919, 208.

any action has been taken against any person or persons resident in the Imperial Hotel, who have been issuing circulars, on behalf of an organization calling itself the Egyptian Association, reflecting on the honor of our troops in Egypt? <sup>135</sup>

These statements insinuate that members of Parliament were more concerned with stopping these publications than the accusations they made. One motive for stopping these publications was the growing international suffragette movement. Thus, Parliament members were specifically attentive to accusations about the treatment of women.

Parliament members also attempt to deflect blame onto non-white (colonial) troops in the British empire by clearly differentiating them from British troops. Sir Charles Yate (1<sup>st</sup> Baronet, Conservative Party politician) questions “what was the nationality of those troops?”<sup>136</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Guinness (1<sup>st</sup> Baron Moyne, Conservative Party politician) answers, “does the hon. Member think that British white troops would drag women out of their beds by the hair of their heads? Does he seriously think that?”<sup>137</sup> These statements suggest that Sir Charles Yate and Lieutenant-Colonel Guinness are trying to lay the blame on non-white subjects of the British empire.<sup>138</sup> This emphasis on the “white troops” implies that someone of their race would never commit this crime. It is also likely that these non-white troops were Indian, given the number of Indian troops conscripted into the British army during World War I. These statements play one colonized group off of another,

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<sup>135</sup> Major Earl Winterton (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Conservative Party politician), Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 19 May to 6 June, 1919, 208..

<sup>136</sup> Sir Charles Yate (1<sup>st</sup> Baronet, Conservative Party politician), Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 19 May to 6 June, 1919, 1853.

<sup>137</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Guinness (1<sup>st</sup> Baron Moyne, Conservative Party politician), Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 19 May to 6 June, 1919, 1853.

<sup>138</sup> NA/FO 848/5, Report, Mr. Spender’s visit to upper Egypt (January 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>, 1920), Foreign Office Papers on the record of conversations held between members of Mission and various people of authority in Egypt 1919-1920. The report states that “Mr. Russell and Mr. McClellenan said they had heard that on one occasion an officer had let Indian troops go through a village in search of arms, after taking the men out but leaving the women in, and that if this had been done there probably would have been some instances of rape in that village.”

another example of British using divide and rule tactics to deflect blame. Parliament members continue to defend British troops by describing the apparent absurdity of these accusations. Captain Frederick Guest (Chief Whip of Prime Minister, David Lloyd George) explains:

General Allenby reports that a press campaign of this kind was evidently being worked up by agitators, probably with a view to assisting the Nationalist campaign in Paris. He has also reported that the troops showed most praiseworthy restraint, often under great provocation.<sup>139</sup>

This assertion insinuates that this type of press campaign could only be worked up by agitators. Given the repetition of the term “agitator” in British official documents, it can be suggested that parliament members wanted to convey that unrest was confined to a small sector of the population. Additionally, by praising the British troops’ apparent self-control, he portrays Egyptians as insubordinate and unruly. He continues:

In a few cases, where a search for arms had to be made at night, portions of certain villages were accidentally set on fire, and women were naturally frightened, but no more. It must be remembered that Egyptian villages are made of mud with roofs of dry cotton stalks, and fires are always of frequent occurrence.<sup>140</sup>

Captain Guest’s statement is a stark contrast to the Egyptian Association’s portrayal of this event. He deflects the blame from British troops by representing Egyptian villages as primitive and dangerous places, where “frightening” fires were “of frequent occurrence.” He concludes that, “to anyone who knows British and Colonial troops, and the standard of discipline in Indian units, the suggestion that they would maltreat women is manifestly absurd.”<sup>141</sup> Captain Guest dismissal of the accusations as “absurd” simultaneously paints

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<sup>139</sup>Captain Frederick Guest (Chief Whip of Prime Minister, David Lloyd George), (hereafter, Parliament, Guest). Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 19 May to 6 June, 1919, 44,

<sup>140</sup> Captain Frederick Guest.

<sup>141</sup> Captain Frederick Guest.

the Egyptian Association as fanciful and defended the British empire, including its composite military made up of significant numbers of Indian troops, as beyond reproach.

Comparably, Russell Pasha defends allegations of police brutality towards women. British troops and police authorities fell under significant scrutiny because of the harsh enforcement methods they used against Egyptian protestors over the course of the revolution. At this point, Egyptians had become internationally vocal – from demanding their right to attend the Paris Peace Conference to working closely with other colonial nations to fight oppressive ruling tactics. As the commandant of the Cairo Police, Russell Pasha was responsible for maintaining order in Cairo and shutting down protestors. Under domestic pressure to keep the peace in the colonies, it was extremely important to vindicate police tactics during the revolution. He describes the difficulty of dealing with women protestors because “stopping a procession means force and any force you use to women puts you in the wrong.”<sup>142</sup> Egyptian women’s participation in the movement was problematic for the police force because if they mishandled the situation, it could stir up more domestic and international agitation. He also uses gender stereotypes to insinuate that male police will always be in the wrong when handling disobedient women. He explains:

at a given signal I closed the cordon and all the ladies found their way opposed by a formidable line of Egyptian conscript police, who had been previously warned that they were to use no violence but to stand still and, if necessary, let their faces be scratched by irate finger-nails.<sup>143</sup>

Russell Pasha defends his position as police commander by establishing that he informed police officials to not use violence, while simultaneously portraying Egyptian women to be

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<sup>142</sup> Russell, *Egyptian Service*, 208.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 206.



inherent savages. He mocks the demonstration by implying that the most harm Egyptian women could cause the police was scratching their faces. This demeans the legitimacy of the women's demonstrations by ridiculing their mechanism of attack.

Russell Pasha further scorns upper-class women's demonstrations in a letter written to his father during the 1919 revolution. He patronizes the women's demonstrations and emphasizes that their participation brought "a note of comedy" to the alarming revolution.<sup>144</sup> He continues,

the idea of being attacked by what they [British police] considered to be extremely immodest females amused my men enormously and considerable license was given them by their officers to practice their ready peasant wit on the smart ladies who confronted them.<sup>145</sup>

Russell Pasha's tone is extremely condescending. He suggests that his officers would be able to easily outsmart Egyptian women with "their ready peasant wit."<sup>146</sup> Russell Pasha consistently asserts that Egyptians were inherently unruly to secure Britain's position. Similar to how members of parliament portrayed the Egyptian Association in Great Britain's accusations to be absurd, Russell Pasha does the same to protect the reputation of British officials in the complex international and colonial context.

Russell Pasha continues to express contempt for their demonstrations in his description of encounters with Egyptian feminists to highlight the anomaly of their involvement. These statements are another example of British divide and rule tactics; the British wanted to portray women to be indifferent to, or even in favor of, their occupation

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 208.

and thus it was essential to explain away their apparent participation in the revolution. He recounts:

I happened to have a previous acquaintance with this very modern young Egyptian woman, who was much in advance of her time in every respect and was by no means *bien vue* by the best families. I intentionally addressed myself to her and thus very soon roused the jealousy of other equally smart and beautiful ladies in the procession, who all wanted to talk at the same time and who much resented the assumption by this particular young woman of the position of Generalissima.

Russell Pasha's description of this woman as "in advance of her time" and "modern" suggests that this was a rarity for Egyptian women. He plays on gender stereotypes by emphasizing how easy it was to excite and distract other woman by his presence and implies that Egyptian women were not actually concerned with protesting. He continues:

I found the poor dears in a sorry condition. It was a hot summer's day. The street to which I had penned them had no shade from the pitiless sun and there was nowhere to sit except upon the hot curb-stones. Some of the more stalwart tried a few more arguments as I apologized for having been so long in bringing them the General's final decision that no procession could be allowed, but it was clear that the majority were beat to the world with their complexions ruined by the sun and their feet blistered by the hot pavement and unaccustomed exercise.<sup>147</sup>

Once again, Russell Pasha's sexist demeanor is evoked in his portrayal of the Egyptian women's demonstrations. He focuses on their physicality by reflecting on how the sun affected their appearance and yet again emphasizes the anomaly of this situation by stating that they were "beat to the world" and not used to exercise. Furthermore, it is evident that Russell Pasha wants to highlight the backwardness of Egyptian society by harping on the fact that women were not used to being outdoors because of the constraints of the Islamic religion. He concludes that after he shut down their demonstration, "everyone was relieved: the ladies were relieved and even thanked me."<sup>148</sup> Russell Pasha portrays himself,

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

and by extension the British empire, as the women's savior. With each claim made, he belittles Egyptian women's activism and establishes that the British presence was not only essential to maintaining order, but also beneficial to Egyptian women.

Similarly, in the Special Mission to Egypt report, the British lament the ignorance of Egyptian women and boast about how they reformed the educational system to help them. The British used female education to justify the need for their occupation. The report states that the largest concern was the prevailing illiteracy amongst Egyptian women and concludes that "the education of Egyptian women is as yet merely in an initial stage."<sup>149</sup> The illiteracy rates are highlighted to portray Egyptian women to be behind in comparison to European women and provide an explanation for why girls' schools were less well-funded than boys' schools. The report describes two distinct school systems for girls – the "Vernacular" and the "Europeanized."<sup>150</sup> The "Vernacular" schools were referred to as "Maktabas" and were focused on teaching children the Quran by memorization. The report explains that in 1897 these Maktabas were "under no form of supervision or control, attended by some 3,000 girls and 173,000 boys."<sup>151</sup> The conditions are described as "hopeless at the time" and the teachers as "illiterate and incompetent."<sup>152</sup> Yet, according to the report, when the British-controlled Ministry of Education intervened and brought the Maktabas under their supervision, substantial reforms were made. Once again this implies that Egyptians were incapable of running schools until the British intervened and helped

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<sup>149</sup> NA/FO 848/7, Report, Notes on the Present Organization of Female Education in Egypt, Foreign Office Papers on Education: series of documents, statistics and memoranda submitted to Mission on subject of education in Egypt 1919-1920.

<sup>150</sup> NA/FO 848/7, 1.

<sup>151</sup> NA/FO 848/7, 1.

<sup>152</sup> NA/FO 848/7, 1.

reform the system. The Mission reports that in regard to female education “much has been done to make the education given in these Maktabas of real practical use to the pupils. Regular instruction in needlepoint and hygiene is now given in all of them, with most satisfactory results.”<sup>153</sup> Female education reforms boasted about in this report actually narrowed opportunities for women. Russell mentions in her article, that Egyptian women strongly disapproved of domestic reforms because they captured the “gender-based differences”<sup>154</sup> of male and female education under British authority. Rather than offer girls and boys the same curriculum, girls’ education was extremely gender specific to keep them isolated out of the work force. British officials wanted to receive credit for modernizing schools, but also wanted to limit opportunities for different segments of the Egyptian population. This was done to isolate Egyptian women from the evolving international feminist and domestic nationalist movements with the hopes that they would remain “in their place” and refrain from participating in any political movements.

The Chief Lady Medical Officer of Girls’ Schools, Mrs. Elgood, submitted a report in June of 1920 that further reveals that British officials wanted to isolate Egyptian women by suppressing education reforms. Like the conclusions reached by the Special Mission to Egypt, Mrs. Elgood argues that one of the largest problems in girls’ schools was inadequate teachers. She asserts:

teaching is a profession and no lady, in the Muslim mind, should have a profession. In Primary schools the Egyptian teachers are not ladies, being for the most part the clever daughters of humble government employees. It may even be said that a woman’s chances of marriage were definitely damaged if she becomes a teacher.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> NA/FO 848/7.

<sup>154</sup> Russell, *Egyptian Service*, 56.

<sup>155</sup> NA/FO 848/6.

Just as British officials had blamed the Omdeh in the provinces for the abuses of the fellahin, Mrs. Elgood blames the Muslim religion for the shortage of teachers. She suggests that if women had freedom to pursue a profession, like European women, more Egyptian women would be educated. Mrs. Elgood also explains that “Mohammedanism, however, tactically obstructs progress of education among women.”<sup>156</sup> Apparent customs of the Muslim religion were used as an excuse for the low literacy rates and to silence the feminist nationalists who had strongly advocated for female education. This was extremely convenient because the British wanted to portray Egyptian women as “backwards” in order to justify their occupation. Dwelling on Egyptian backwardness was a political tactic to obstruct Egyptian women from modernizing, without taking the blame.

Mrs. Elgood further deflects the responsibility for reforming female schools by implying that Egyptian women were inherently incapable of achieving a higher intellectual status. Once again, the British played on gender stereotypes. Mrs. Elgood reports:

when she visited Egyptian ladies, or met them in trams and railway carriages, no woman was ever seen reading a newspaper. Their conversation was confined to the subjects of cotton, jewelry, clothes, etc. The great tendency was for women to get carried away by their emotions and this was the force which would always have to be reckoned with.<sup>157</sup>

She undermines female education by characterizing upper-class Egyptian women to be uninterested because their emotions overtook their brains. This implies that no matter what attempts British officials made to reform female education, Egyptian women would be uninterested in anything but the most frivolous of topics.

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<sup>156</sup> NA/FO 848/6.

<sup>157</sup> NA/FO 848/6.

Because of this, she suggests that education reforms needed to focus on girls learning practical skills, rather than math and science like the boys. Her report advises that upper-class girls should be taught French rather than English because “it would be more useful to them...if they were to learn French, as that is the language of most of their dress makers, hair dressers, etc., etc.”<sup>158</sup> Mrs. Elgood implies that Egyptian women were uninterested in intellectually stimulating subjects and only concerned with feminine upkeep. Moreover, recommending that Egyptian women not be taught English, the language of their colonizer, limits their ability to follow political developments. While Mrs. Elgood presents these recommendations as practical, they in fact narrowed opportunities for Egyptian women. Nonetheless, it is evident the British wanted these reforms to appear as attempts to improve women’s status.

In terms of women in the provinces, the report explains that “as far as education among the lower classes is concerned, the daughter of a fellah hardly ever goes to school: they are quite illiterate and blissfully happy.”<sup>159</sup> Throughout British official documents, the fellahin are constantly portrayed as content and isolated from the rest of society. The division of women by class further reflects British official’s attempts to divide and rule the Egyptian population. British assertions about female education in Egypt demonstrate that they actively narrowed educational opportunities out of fear that such opportunities would lead to increased participation in the nationalist movement and resistance to the British occupation. As Lord Cromer had warned in 1908, “whatever we do, education must produce its natural results, and one of these natural results, both in India and Egypt, will be

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<sup>158</sup> NA/FO 848/6.

<sup>159</sup> NA/FO 848/6.

the wish to get rid of the foreigner.”<sup>160</sup> British officials had introduced a westernized education system and literacy program in India, which the British concluded resulted in the distaste of British presence.<sup>161</sup> The British wanted to prevent the same thing from happening in Egypt.

British officials’ portrayal of Egyptian women further supports the argument that the British were still clinging to the hope that dividing Egyptian society would prolong their colonial occupation after World War I. Comparable to the portrayal of the fellahin, British officials attempted to depict Egyptian women as inherently ignorant and either indifferent to or content with the occupation. British officials constantly harped on the constraints of Islamic religion and played on gender stereotypes to assert the importance of a colonial presence in Egypt. The extent to which they attempted to belittle women’s participation in the revolution and isolated all Egyptian women by narrowing educational opportunities reveals that the British were extremely defensive about their position in Egypt

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<sup>160</sup> NA/FO 633/14, Correspondence, Cromer to Gorst, March 12, 1908, The Cromer Papers.

<sup>161</sup> Tignor, *Modernization*, 195.

### Chapter 3: Students

The Report of the Special Mission to Egypt concludes that Egyptian students were the main cause of recent disorders and unrest in Egypt before and after the 1919 revolution. When the Mission entered Egypt, they describe that they were met with extreme hostility from the heads of Al-Azhar University, the center of religious teaching, and from teachers and students of government run schools.<sup>162</sup> The Mission explains that “unrest among the educated classes in Egypt was, as had already been pointed out, manifest long before the crisis of 1919.”<sup>163</sup> It was beneficial to British officials characterize students as the cause of the unrest because the British knew that the educated Egyptians would be discontented with the occupation. Similar to how British officials represented the fellahin as isolated in the provinces and the women restricted by of the constraints of the Islamic religion, they described students as confined to their social class in the cities. Scholars too have emphasized the important role of Egyptian student leadership of the nationalist movement, yet British perceptions of student activism present a stark contrast. British official documents constantly present students as inherently disobedient in order to insinuate that their unrest was irrational and unavoidable.

Prior to the British occupation in 1882, education had been evolving for years. As noted in chapter two, Muhammad Ali’s reforms were instrumental in creating a new educated class of Egyptians.<sup>164</sup> He sent Egyptians to study abroad in Europe, established a printing press, and opened a series of schools. One of these schools was the School of Languages, which made it possible for European works to be translated and circulated

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<sup>162</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 4.

<sup>163</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 10.

<sup>164</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49.



throughout the nation.<sup>165</sup> This constructed a new generation and network of intellectuals in Egypt who used their training in European schools to share their knowledge with the larger Egyptian populace.<sup>166</sup> Among this new group of Egyptians was Rifa'ah Rafi al-Tahtawi, whom historians have deemed one of the most significant reformers of Muhammad Ali's era.

Rifa'ah Rafi al-Tahtawi spent eight years studying at Al-Azhar before departing on the first educational mission to France under Muhammad Ali in 1826.<sup>167</sup> His experience abroad challenged his way of thinking and gave him a new Western perspective on language, sciences, social order, and nationalism. Upon his return to Egypt, he taught in schools, advocated for female education, and translated countless European books to make them more accessible to Egyptians. In *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*, Jamal Mohammad Ahmed explains that "before him European learning was practically unknown to Egyptians and it may therefore be said that the intellectual movement in Egypt began with his studentship in Paris and the book he wrote then."<sup>168</sup> Al-Tahtawi went on to publish seventeen books on many topics, ranging from education to social order.<sup>169</sup> Muhammad Ali instructed that Al-Tahtawi's books be taught in Egyptians schools and received notable attention because of their nationalistic tone. Ahmed describes that al-Tahtawi's book *Al-Manahji* was the most influential book in Egypt in the nineteenth century because he "was the first Egyptian who saw Egypt as a nation, distinct from the general body of the Islamic community. He saw Egyptian history as something different and

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<sup>165</sup> Jamal Ahmed, 10.

<sup>166</sup> Vatikiotis, 101.

<sup>167</sup> Jamal Ahmed, 11.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 11-13.

continuous.”<sup>170</sup> He introduced a new way of thinking about Egypt that fostered the foundation for an intellectual movement across the nation.

Muhammad Ali’s reign ended in 1848 and it was not until 1863 that educational reforms in Egypt resumed under the rule of Khedive Ismail. During his reign from 1863 to 1879, Ismail expanded state schooling to the provinces, established a national library and museum, and promoted educational missions abroad.<sup>171</sup> In addition to creating specialized schools in the cities, Khedive Ismail was dedicated to growing primary education in the provinces. Education in the provinces was essential because of the opportunities it created for lower class Egyptians. Furthermore, he standardized the nation’s curriculum and testing system. Besides Muhammad Ali, scholars acknowledge Khedive Ismail’s education reforms to be fundamental in the making of a modern Egypt. Vatikiotis claims:

the period 1863-82 was the most crucial in the evolution of modern Egypt, for the vast educational and intellectual strides made by Egyptians after 1882 had interesting and, in many ways, enduring social and political consequences.<sup>172</sup>

Furthermore, Beinín argues:

western-style education concurrently expanded the ranks of the *effendiyya*<sup>173</sup> and provided a vocabulary for imagining Egypt as a political space comparable to European nation states. Thus empowered, the *effendiyya* presented themselves as bearers of a national mission and sought to forge new relations with both foreigners and lower-class Egyptians.<sup>174</sup>

These Egyptian leaders pushed for education reforms, challenged foreign rule, and laid the foundation for the nationalist party’s success during the occupation.

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Vatikiotis, 90.

<sup>173</sup> Effendiyya is the Egyptian term for student class.

<sup>174</sup> Beinín, “Egypt: Society and Economy,” 314.

Simultaneously, Al-Azhar University in Cairo was undergoing significant reform. As a religious university, Al-Azhar was affected differently by educational missions. In fact, it was more influenced by the movement of scholars throughout the Middle East rather than Europe. Many of the intellectuals who studied at Al-Azhar were devoted to forming a nationalistic consciousness that coincided with Islamic teachings. The notable Al-Azhar scholar, Muhammad 'Abduh, was committed to creating a create "a new type of 'ulema<sup>175</sup> who could articulate and teach the real Islam and so provide the basis for a stable and progressive society, a 'middle group' between the traditional and revolutionary forces."<sup>176</sup> Students of 'Abduh went on to become nationalist leaders in their nations when under colonial rule. For example, in "Representing Copts and Muhammadans: Empire, Nation, and Community in Egypt and India, 1880-1917," C.A. Baly explains:

Indian students at the Al-Azhar seminary in Cairo, for instance, formed a network through which the ideas of Mahomed Abduh were brought into the same public arena as those of Syed Ahmed Khan and the Ali brothers, and other major reformers in India.<sup>177</sup>

The networks Baly describes were imperative in constructing a nationalist ideology in Egypt and India when confronted with colonial rule. Amongst these scholars, ideas about imperialism, colonialism, and nationalism were discussed and shared. Thus, it can be suggested that the intellectual class throughout the Middle East and South Asia was much more connected than colonial officials perceived.

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<sup>175</sup> Islamic Scholars.

<sup>176</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1789-1939* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1962), 139.

<sup>177</sup> C.A. Baly, "Representing Copts and Muhammadans: Empire, Nation, and Community in Egypt and India, 1880-1914," in Robert Ilbert's, (ed.) *Modernity and Culture from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, 1890-1920* (Columbia University Press, 2002), 161.

The dramatic rise of Egyptian nationalism in the years preceding the war has been attributed to the Lord Cromer's system of rule and specifically his attitude toward education. His priorities were to restore financial stability to Egypt and avoid the unrest that manifested in India. Russell discloses that his experience in India taught him "that too much education makes for an unwieldy, critical populace."<sup>178</sup> She continues:

thus, he revamped the educational system in Egypt by limiting access to education, increasing fees and the number of people paying them, changing the composition of the student body, and changing the curriculum within the schools.<sup>179</sup>

Lord Cromer believed this would quell antagonistic feelings towards Britain.<sup>180</sup> Yet Robert Tignor explains in *Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt, 1882-1914* that his policies "had the effect of doing precisely what he wanted to avoid."<sup>181</sup> Lord Cromer's harsh method of rule led to an Egyptian political crisis by the early twentieth century. According to Daly, "the political crisis of these years established the nationalist movement in Egypt; consequently, the British were compelled to rely on autocratic techniques more frequently to maintain their position."<sup>182</sup> For example, Tignor explains that Lord Cromer "isolated himself from the Egyptian population" and established "the image of superiority- both military and moral- of the British and by punishing all efforts to challenge this position."<sup>183</sup> Consequently, British officials had a difficult time understanding the Egyptian population and were "unable to acquire accurate knowledge of the feelings of the Egyptian people."<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Russell, "Competing, Overlapping, and Contradictory Agendas," 51.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> For a detailed account of Lord Cromer's education policies in Egypt in relation to India see, Tignor, "The Indianization."

<sup>181</sup> Tignor, *Modernization*.

<sup>182</sup> Daly, 147.

<sup>183</sup> Tignor, *Modernization*, 195.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

At the same time, the educated class recognized the British officials disconnect from the Egyptian population and used it to strengthen their nationalist campaign. They challenged British policies and used their literacy to spread anti-British sentiments in the press. Educated Egyptians read articles to the illiterate class to ensure that their nationalist ideology spread to a wider range of the Egyptian population. Concurrently, in 1907 three political parties were established: the People's Party, the Constitutional Reform Party, and the Nationalist Party. While these three parties were initially confined to a small sector of society, they played a significant role in promoting nationalism among the Egyptian population. When the British declared a protectorate at the start of World War I, the stage was set for a mass nationalist uprising against the British.

The 1919 revolution suggests that the British were naïve to underestimate the power of the student population or its connections to other sectors of society. Throughout British official documents, the British persistently separate the students of Al-Azhar from the rest of society. Official documents blame the Azharites (students of Al-Azhar) for disturbances during the protectorate period and label them as the leaders of the entire movement. It is not until the 1919 revolution that the British recognize the broader students' ability to rally the Egyptian nation through anti-British propaganda and demonstrations. It was beneficial to separate Al-Azhar students from government students because the British made it very clear that they were not involved with Al-Azhar. When addressing problems in the government schools, British officials deflect the blame to students' parents and argue that they are inherently disobedient. Similar to how the British presented the fellahin to be an isolated sector of society that supported the occupation, conversely, they portrayed Egyptian students as the only sector in opposition to the

occupation. They did this in order to validate their policies and to appear as though they had more support than they did.

In the Special Mission to Egypt report, the Mission assesses the causes of recent and existing disorder amongst students preceding the 1919 revolution. The British needed to defend the work they did in government schools to justify and secure their occupation in their colonies. In the section of the report, “The Present Situation and its Difficulties,” the Mission states that “anti-British feeling is practically confined to the upper class and the intelligenzia” and “it has also gained a strong hold on Azhar, and Nationalism is now reinforced by Islamism.”<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, they explain:

There is no general hostility to the British among the fellahin or smaller landowners. Any manifestations of such hostility have been due to the influence of Nationalist emissaries from the towns, exploiting religious feeling or temporary grievance connected with the war. The most dangerous of these emissaries are the Azharites.<sup>186</sup>

The Mission aims to clarify in the report that the Egyptian disturbances were confined to a small sector of society and hold the Azharites responsible for the unrest in Egypt in order to justify their rule. British divide and rule tactics are conspicuous in this statement, as the Mission attempts to explain Egyptian hostility by dividing society based on geographical region and class. Furthermore, students were constantly referred to as “agitators” and “extremists” in order to portray them to be inherently disobedient and radical. They assert that nationalist leaders were “capable and dangerous” because of their radical religious views.<sup>187</sup> British officials continuously made a clear distinction between religiously

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<sup>185</sup> NA/FO 848/19, 1.

<sup>186</sup> NA/FO 848/19, 1.

<sup>187</sup> NA/FO 141/521/6.

educated Egyptians and government educated Egyptians to argue that this unrest was confined to a small and radical sector of society.

This tactic is evident in British police commander, Russell Pasha's autobiography. Russell Pasha describes that "in mentioning students it is necessary to differentiate between the students of the government schools and those of Azhar."<sup>188</sup> It was necessary and beneficial to make this distinction because the British needed to maintain that they were not responsible for Azharites behavior. He continues:

the Azhar students were in those days a turbulent crowd, always ready to make disturbance on any excuse that could be counted a religious one. Though usually not mixing with the government school students, on this occasion they made common cause with them.<sup>189</sup>

Russell Pasha's statement insinuates that the Azharites relationship with government students was not a normal happenstance. It also suggests that he wants to depict their disturbances to be religiously motivated, so that the British could not be faulted. He proceeds to discuss the accumulation of events during the 1919 revolution and describes that "during those two days there were incidents all over the native quarters of the town, but the focus was the Azhar Mosque, which formed a most difficult problem."<sup>190</sup> It was convenient to deem Al-Azhar as the center of the disturbances because the scope of British authority had not extended into religious institutions.

Furthermore, when describing Egyptians who studied in Europe, British officials degrade their education by ridiculing the thought that they could ever be equal to Europeans. Official documents insinuate that Egyptians were inherently inferior to all

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<sup>188</sup> Russell, *Egyptian Service*, 192.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibd.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibd.*, 193.

Europeans to make the point that British control was necessary. Hooker concludes that the nationalist movement was a product of the evolution of education over the late nineteenth and twentieth century. He reports that “the leaders are men who style themselves as the intellectuals of Egypt, and are mostly men of legal training, many of them educated in Europe.”<sup>191</sup> Hooker’s choice of language - “style themselves” - to describe nationalist leaders undermines their intellectual ability in comparison to European intellectuals. He continues that “the outstanding leaders are men whose ambitions have been disappointed, men of intense vanity, and who, if given power, would be the first to misuse it.”<sup>192</sup> Considering the pressure from the League of Nation’s newly implemented mandate system, it was important that the British portrayed current Egyptian leaders to be incapable of independently governing. They explain that leaders, such as Saad Zaghlul, Ismail Sidki, and Mohamed Mahmoud, had stirred up agitation because they believed they should be valued the same as Europeans. He concludes that these men “deliberately set to work to stir up discontent with the existing order of things.”<sup>193</sup> Hooker continuously notes their reckless misuse of power by describing detailed accounts of the demonstrations the nationalist leaders had apparently caused across Egypt to build the case that Egyptians needed British guidance.

On account of the central role students played in the 1919 revolution, it was crucial for the British officials to address and appear concerned about problems in the government school system. In the report, “The Present State of Education in Egyptian Government Schools” written by George Robb, a member of the Ministry of Education, he assesses the

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<sup>191</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>192</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>193</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.



education problem in government run schools after the 1919 revolution. He refers to 1919 as the end of the “golden era” and depicts that trouble began in the schools “when all classes of students were taught to regard themselves as the soldiers of the national movement.”<sup>194</sup> Robb attributes the shift in students’ attitudes to nationalist leaders such as Saad Zaghlul, who often referred to students as his army. British officials argue that nationalist leaders were able to captivate students’ attention when British officials disappeared from schools and were replaced by “men of an inferior caliber” during the protectorate period.<sup>195</sup> Robb explains that this resulted in “the total destruction of that spirit of obedience which the British regime fostered.”<sup>196</sup> Similar to how British official reports criticize the Omdeh for abusing power in the provinces during the war, Robb argues that nationalist leaders took advantage of students in the cities. The lack of British presence in government schools during the war resulted in a loss of confidence in British authority and consequently led to the 1919 student strikes. Robb recounts that teachers “incited the students to strike, and even drove away in many cases the few students who desired to study and avoid striking.”<sup>197</sup> Furthermore, he continues, “it is also commonly asserted that the Wafdist extremists have paid agents in all the schools, ready at all times to create strikes and organize demonstrations.”<sup>198</sup> The British attempt to defend their work in schools by claiming that inferior teachers forced students to strike. It was important to proclaim that the disturbances were fostered by a select group of Egyptians, rather than a

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<sup>194</sup> NA/FO 141/521/5, Attitudes and Activities of School Population and Student Leaders, 1919-192, Foreign Office papers on the Egyptian Political Situation.

<sup>195</sup> NA/FO 141/521/5.

<sup>196</sup> NA/FO 141/521/5.

<sup>197</sup> NA/FO 141/521/5.

<sup>198</sup> NA/FO 141/521/5.

natural accumulation of unrest. Furthermore, Robb constantly highlighted the inadequacy of Egyptian teachers. He portrays the Egyptian teachers as self-interested and incapable of maintaining respect and obedience from their students to emphasize how necessary British presence was.

The religious curriculum in government schools became troublesome to the British when the nationalist movement gained support from Al-Azhar. British officials proclaimed that students in every Egyptian school were being fed nationalist propaganda by their religious teachers.<sup>199</sup> Hooker explains that “no matter what schools the young Egyptians attend, their religious education is given by graduates of Al-Azhar.”<sup>200</sup> It is important to note that many of the nationalist leaders had attended Al-Azhar, in addition to studying abroad in Europe. Upon his arrival in Egypt, Lord Allenby states that “Al-Azhar, the great Moslem religious college of Cairo, is the center of disaffection now; and owing to its sanctity, it is difficult and dangerous to deal with the agitation there preached and fostered.”<sup>201</sup> For the British, grappling with the threat of Al-Azhar was complicated because of the university’s religious aspect. It was convenient to harp on this factor because the British were able to use the Muslim religion as a scapegoat. Furthermore, Mr. R. A. Brown, a member of the Ministry of Education, describes the difficulties of religious education in government schools in his education report. He explains “it has been extremely difficult to know what is taught precisely on the Moslem side.”<sup>202</sup> Religion was the one part of the curriculum the British were incapable of curtailing, and consequently claimed they were

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<sup>199</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4

<sup>200</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>201</sup> Allenby, April 4, 1919.

<sup>202</sup> NA/FO 848/6, 5.

unable to determine the value of religious teaching in schools. Thus, it was easy for the British to blame unrest in government schools on religious teachers. British officials emphasize that “strikes were largely engineered by the teachers,” and, specifically, religious teachers posed a threat to maintaining order amongst students. Similar to how Robb condemns Egyptian teachers for stirring up agitation in government schools, British officials constantly separate religious students and government students to argue that the agitation is confined to religious educated Egyptians.<sup>203</sup>

British official documents also note other “evils” of the educational system, which they attribute to the growth of the movement.<sup>204</sup> The Mission affirms that when government schools were run by Egyptians, order and discipline did not exist.<sup>205</sup> Following the 1919 revolution, Hooker considers the main grievance amongst students to be the lack of opportunities after graduation. Compared to the opportunities offered after graduation in Europe, Egyptian were restricted to civil service careers. He describes that these had “no charms for the educated youth of Egypt. Such callings entailed responsibility and hard work, both of which are avoided, when possible, by Egyptians.”<sup>206</sup> Hooker condemns the educated youth by implying that they are unsatisfied with the opportunities offered in Egypt because of their work ethic. He does this to divert attention away from the fact that there were few opportunities for educated Egyptians. Ultimately, this led to the over-crowding of popular professions, such as law. Hooker notes that “the law school has always been the center of all student demonstrations, and may be looked upon as the executive of

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<sup>203</sup> Allenby, April 21, 1919.

<sup>204</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>205</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>206</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

the malcontent lawyers in Egypt.”<sup>207</sup> Given that the majority of the Egyptian educated class continued on to become lawyers, Hooker discredits their profession by describing them as “malcontent lawyers.” Even within the educated class, British officials consistently produced divisions as a strategy of domination. It was part of their strategy to divide the educated class into teachers, religious teachers, Al-Azhar graduates, and more, in order to explain the unrest amongst students in Egypt.

In addition to understanding how students’ unrest accumulated in schools, their important role in the revolution forced the British to recognize the faults in the government school system. For example, the Mission states:

while the British occupation has conferred great material benefits on Egypt and has relieved the population from the grosser forms of oppression and injustice, it has not in any corresponding degree raised the general level of civilization prevailing among the vast majority or improved the conditions under which they live. This has been mainly due to the failure of the administration to establish any system of education which extends to the mass of the people.<sup>208</sup>

At the time, it was important for Britain to appear concerned about the status of their colonies because of the international scrutiny they faced after the war. Yet, rather than hold the British Ministry of Education responsible for the lack educational reforms, the report explains that they “cannot be held responsible for the limitations of the resources at its disposal.”<sup>209</sup> Once again, the British officials justified their position by blaming Egyptians for the failures of the education system. They also note that the Ministry of Education should not be in charge of managing schools but act as a “central guiding authority for education.”<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, the report gathers that the most urgent need is to extend

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<sup>207</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>208</sup> NA/FO 848/19.

<sup>209</sup> NA/FO 848/19.

<sup>210</sup> NA/FO 848/19.

national elementary education to the masses of Egyptians. This included making elementary education free, regulating building policies, reforming the examination system, and providing equal education in the cities and provinces.<sup>211</sup> They conclude that if these reforms were adopted general civilization would improve. Yet, nonetheless, Khedive Ismail undertook these exact education reforms during his reign before the British occupied Egypt.<sup>212</sup> Once again, the British conveniently ignore the fact that education reforms had progressed prior to their occupation.

Overall, analysis of British official documents suggest that the British divided society to appear as though they had support from some groups of Egyptians. This was apparent in Hooker's description of schools in the cities versus the provinces. He explains that "in England our great schools and universities are situated far away from the excitement and temptations of large towns."<sup>213</sup> While conversely, "when framing the educational system in Egypt, those responsible failed to foresee the result of allowing boys from the Provinces to come under the influence of a great city."<sup>214</sup> Hooker's depiction shows that British officials wanted to portray the unrest amongst Egyptians to be confined to the cities to appear as though they had support from Egyptians in the provinces. It was part of their governing strategy to keep the provinces isolated from the cities. Hence, when this failed the British criticized the Egyptian's for not imitating the British educational system. Furthermore, Hooker explains that "the young Egyptian, when sent to school, is deficient in many qualities which are characteristics of the European boy. Speaking broadly, there is no moral

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<sup>211</sup> NA/FO 848/19.

<sup>212</sup> Vatikiotis, 90.

<sup>213</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>214</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

training of the children in Egyptian homes, and parental discipline is generally lax.”<sup>215</sup> As a result, these children are left in the care of “ignorant and fanatical servants, who instill hatred of the foreigner in their minds.”<sup>216</sup> Hooker’s claims suggest that the British perceived the educated youth from the provinces to be more susceptible to nationalist propaganda because of the environment they grew up in. It implies that the British believed their lack of discipline at home made the Egyptians out of control and disobedient. Additionally, he makes a clear distinction between the educated youth in Europe and Egypt to affirm that the Europeans are naturally superior. Highlighting this distinction was beneficial to argue an Egyptian revolution was inevitable because Egyptians were inherently inferior to Europeans. Therefore, in the perspective of the British, if Egyptians had the same moral fiber as Europeans. Disturbances and unrest throughout Egypt would have not taken place, and the British would not have had to step in – or to stay – to reform the country.

Reports also emphasize the class divisions the current school system created in the provinces. In the Ministry of Education’s report, Brown claims that one of the biggest evils of the school system is that “a child who goes to school begins to despise his father and mother, who could neither read nor write.”<sup>217</sup> To solve this problem, Brown advocates for combining primary and secondary education to increase the number of schools in the provinces so more Egyptians could obtain a primary degree.<sup>218</sup> He explains that this would allow “boys to remain at home up till the age of at least ten years, and yet not be excluded

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<sup>215</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>216</sup> NA/FO 141/521/4.

<sup>217</sup> NA/FO 848/6, 5.

<sup>218</sup> NA/FO 848/6, 5.

from the possibility of gaining a primary certificate.”<sup>219</sup> This is an example of the British clearly isolating Egyptians in the provinces by narrowing education opportunities. Brown argues that if boys spent less time in the cities, they would grow up to be more fit for a career in agriculture. He explains that “by the old system of education, a class was being created entirely unfitted for agriculture, the mainspring of Egypt’s prosperity.”<sup>220</sup> The educated youth would “go into towns” and “tend to become effendis (high status men) and never settle down to country life again.”<sup>221</sup> Brown implies that the British were concerned with the division between educated youth and their parents because of the void it was creating in agricultural careers, with the corollary assumption that Egyptians are more fit for agricultural careers than they are for other ones. Furthermore, this British suggested that the present education system strengthened class divisions and produced a supposedly new generation of educated Egyptians in the provinces. Institutional policies that would keep boys in the provinces at home until age ten would reinforce the Egyptian class structure and keep them isolated from cities.

It is also clear that the British wanted to depict Egyptians as inferior by constantly highlighting the perceived moral deficiencies of students. The prevalence of Egyptian parents throughout education reports indicates that the British wanted to blame government students’ unrest on their home environments. The report explains that “Egyptian parents complain that the discipline and character of their children deteriorates in the schools,” while “the school authorities report that the evil begins at home.”<sup>222</sup> It was

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<sup>219</sup> NA/FO 848/6, 5.

<sup>220</sup> NA/FO 848/6, 5.

<sup>221</sup> NA/FO 848/6, 5.

<sup>222</sup> NA/FO 848/19.

convenient for British officials to illustrate disobedient acts in government schools as distinctive Egyptian characteristics. Doing so took the responsibility off British officials shoulders and painted Egyptian students to be naturally disobedient. Thus, in regard to necessary reforms, the reports constantly assert that the only solution for this problem is to “provide that the education given should train the character as well as the intelligence of the new generation.”<sup>223</sup> The British were confident they could bring back the Egyptian “spirit of obedience”<sup>224</sup> by reforming the government school system to teach European moral values.

Simultaneous with the events that occurred in Egypt, the British empire’s position in colonial nations under close examination by the League of Nations. As a result, the 1919 revolution reflected poorly on their ability to govern Egypt. Considering the massive role Egyptian students played the revolution, it is not surprising that the British attempted to reform the government school curriculum to actually narrow educational opportunities. Keeping the educated class isolated from conspiring with other nations was vitally important to securing the empire. The British director of intelligence published a special report titled “Indian and Egyptian Conspirators in England and the Remedy” that investigates the accumulation of unrest in India and Egypt after the war. The report explains many cases of Egyptians and Indians societies in England conspiring with native Egyptian and Indian’s to stir up unrest in the colonies. The report states:

the purpose of this Report is to show that these two movements, if not actually directed by natives living in England draw their inspiration from such persons, and that the impunity with which Indians and Egyptians can hatch revolution at the

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<sup>223</sup> NA/FO 848/19.

<sup>224</sup> NA/FO 141/521/5.



center of the Empire re-acts very unfavorably upon the loyalty of the Egyptians and Indians and may culminate in the commission of outrages in England itself.<sup>225</sup>

British officials had to be aware of how the situation in the colonies correlated with domestic disturbances. It can be insinuated that the British believed unrest in India and Egypt did not naturally manifest but had been inspired by Indian and Egyptian communities in England. Therefore, it was in Britain's best interest to keep the two groups separate by curtailing educational opportunities. British reforms kept natives illiterate, so they could not conspire with other colonies and nations.

The Special Mission of Egypt reached the consensus that education reforms were imperative to restoring peace and order. The repetition and weight placed on Egyptian students in official documents published after the 1919 revolution revealed that the British recognized the educated class to be the biggest threat to their occupation. Members of the educated class proved to play an integral role in the revolution based on their ability to unify the Egyptian masses. Therefore, British official documents constantly divide the educated class based on status, occupation, geographic location to explain the unrest. They characterize the Egyptians' behavior to be inherent in order to defend government schools from being held responsible for the disturbances. While the British wanted to appear concerned with the status of education in Egypt, the lack of adequate attention paid to the school system over the course of their occupation contradicted their claims in education reports.

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<sup>225</sup> NA/CAB 24/83/56.

## **Conclusion**

The British occupation of Egypt has been a compelling topic for scholars due to the complexity of the British empire's position in their colonies in the post-World-War I period. It can be concluded that international, domestic, and colonial pressure forced the British empire to be very careful about how they positioned themselves in these contexts. When the 1919 revolution occurred, the British had to strategically construct a narrative that would enhance their colonial image and downplay the Egyptian nation's unity. The extent to which the fellahin, women, and students are repeatedly invoked in the sources suggests that their unity in the 1919 revolution forced the British to re-double efforts to divide the population in ways that would justify their continued presence in the country.

As this thesis argues, in the case of the 1919 revolution, the British were not prepared for a full scale united movement because of a combination of ignorance and calculated strategy. The British perceived the nationalist movement to be confined to radical groups of religiously educated Egyptian men in the cities and thus were not prepared for a mass revolutionary movement backed by all sectors of society. The British assumed that Egyptians would not recognize the oppressive nature of their reforms and assent to increased colonial presence during World War I. The British relied on the imperial hierarchy and constantly professed that they were able to outsmart the Egyptians because they were naturally inferior. Not only did the success of the 1919 revolution reveal that the Egyptian nation was far less inept and backwards than British official documents professed, but it also challenged the British empire's reputation on a grand international scale. Conclusively, the Egyptians were much more politically aware and internationally connected than the British perceived.

Upon completion of the Special Mission's stay in Egypt, the Mission concluded that abolishing the protectorate and forming a treaty was the only way to restore civil obedience and peace in Egypt.<sup>226</sup> At this point, the Mission recognized that British officials underestimated the power of the nationalist movement and relied too heavily on ruling tactics that were successful in other colonies to govern Egypt. Coming to agreement with nationalist leaders was the only way to protect Britain's foreign interests in Egypt and maintain peace. The 1919 revolution marked a watershed in Egyptian history because of the movement's ability to bring international attention to the situation in Egypt. The Egyptian nation's unity and the movement's mass scale impressed upon the British that they needed to find new ways to maintain their interests in Egypt.

The British professed 1919 revolution to be a massive turning point for the Egyptians. Yet, as I have shown, it was the culmination of decades of nationalist and anti-colonial activism across many sectors of the Egyptian population. Moreover, the British reaction to the revolution was to continue to divide the population in the same ways they had before the revolution. While the revolution and the post-war international climate persuaded the British to adopt a new form of colonialism in Egypt, "empire by treaty," in many ways it was still business as usual. The British continued to profess that there were irreconcilable divisions in Egyptian society based on an essential immaturity. The discourse following the revolution reveals continuity of British ruling tactics, not change.

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<sup>226</sup> NA/CAB 24/117/49, 22.

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